

The Role of Political Parties in Parish and Town Councils

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Abstract

Political parties have been around since the 17th century, they are familiar to many for the major role they play in Central Government debates, national policy making and decisions, and the cut and thrust politics of the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. There was a perception that political parties were spreading, and becoming more of a feature within Parish & Town Councils (P&TCs), at the grass roots level of local government. This dissertation researches the politicisation of P&TCs and investigates, analyses and evaluates the role political parties play at the most local level of government.

The primary research was carried out in the form of questionnaires, and resulted in data which was compared to a 1991 survey. The results confirmed that political parties are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs; the research showed that 48% of councils surveyed had members who declared political affiliation compared to 10% in the 1991 survey, and 19% of councils were run along political lines compared to 4% in the 1991 survey.

A number of significant new findings and issues were revealed by the research; 9% of P&TCs had an appointed political leader. The research revealed new data on the politicisation of P&TCs, and highlighted many differing opinions and views about the role and influences of political parties from not only within P&TCs, but also from principal authorities.

The research led to a number of recommendations being made to specific bodies; it is also intended to be used as a basis for further research and study into some of the issues that have arisen as a result of this dissertation.

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DECLARATION:

**This dissertation is the product of my own
work.**

**I agree that it may be made available for
reference and photocopying at the discretion of
the University**

Dominic Stapleton

April 2011

The Role of Political Parties in
Parish & Town Councils
Contents

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Glossary of Key Terms and Acronyms</u>	ix
<u>Chapter 1: Introduction</u>	
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Author's Interest in the Study	2
1.3 Hypotheses	3
1.4 Aim	4
1.5 Objectives	4
1.6 Research Methodology	4
(a) Literature Review	4
(b) Questionnaires, Comparative Study and Interviews	5
1.7 Summary	5
<u>Chapter 2: Literature Review</u>	
2. Introduction	6
2.1 Political Parties in Local Government	6
2.2 Councillors and the Political Parties	9
2.3 The Pros and Cons of Political Parties in Local Councils and Government	11
2.4 The Influence of National Politics	14

	<u>Page</u>
2.5 Summary	16
<u>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</u>	
3. Introduction	18
3.1 Research Issues	18
3.2 Research Methods	19
(a) Secondary Research	19
(b) Primary Research	19
3.3 Choice of Primary Research Methods	20
(a) Structured Questionnaire	20
(b) Structured Qualitative Questionnaire	23
(c) Semi-Structured Open-Ended Style Interviews	24
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis	25
3.5 Limitations of the Research Methodology	25
3.6 Summary	26
<u>Chapter 4: Results and Analysis</u>	
4. Introduction	27
4.1 First Questionnaire Results	27
(a) Responses	27
(b) Politicisation	33
(c) An Appointed Leader	35
(d) Political Parties	36
(e) Key Themes from General Comments	38
(i) Principal Authorities	39
(ii) Elections	40
(iii) Officers of the Council	42

	<u>Page</u>
(iv) Political Parties – Negative Comments	42
(v) Political Parties – Positive Comments	44
(vi) Political Parties – General Comments	45
(vii) Political Parties – Concluding Comments	46
(viii) National Politics	47
(ix) Training	47
4.2 Second Questionnaire Results	48
4.3 Summary	48
 <u>Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations</u>	
5.1 Introduction	49
5.2 Conclusions	49
5.3 Recommendations	52
(a) To Central Government	53
(b) To LGA	53
(c) To NALC	53
(d) To All Training Providers Involved with P&TCs	53
(e) To NALC/SLCC	54
(f) To ILCM/NALC/SLCC/UOG - for further study	54

<u>Figures</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Map (Courtesy of National Council for Voluntary Organisations, online 2011) Showing the Geographical Representation of responses by English Region	28
2. Map (Courtesy of ITravelUK, online 2011) Showing the Geographical Representation of Responses by County	29
3. Percentage of Respondents from Parishes, Towns and “Others”	30
4. Percentage of Responses by Rural, Urban and a Rural/Urban Mix	31
5. Percentage of Responses by Population	32
6. Percentage of Responses in Comparison with the 1991 Politicisation Survey Figures, Black = 1991 v Red = 2010	33
7. Percentages of Responses with an Appointed Leader by Political Party	35
8. Percentage of Responses of Members by Political Party who declared Political Affiliation	36
9. Comparative Percentage Figures between the Political Parties in the Questionnaire Responses and the 2010 General Election	37

Tables

1. Political Affiliation of 1000 Councils by Council Size Surveyed In 1991 (Ellwood et al 1992, p30)	7
2. Brief Summary of the Pros and Cons of Political Parties in Local Councils/Government	14
3. Percentage of Responses by Parish/Town, Rural/Urban/Mix	32
4. Percentage of Responses by Parish/Town and Political Affiliation/Run along Political Lines	34

<u>Appendices</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. The Literature Review SWOT Analysis	55
2. The Pilot Questions for the Questionnaires	57
3. First Questionnaire and Covering Letter	58
4. Second Questionnaire and Covering Letter	61
5. Comparative Study of the Results from the Second Questionnaire	64
6. Response Distribution by County to the First Questionnaire	66
7. Key Themes and Comments from the Responses to the First Questionnaire to P&TCs	67
8. Comparison of Key Findings between the Secondary Research (Literature Review) and the Primary Research	76
9. Summary of the Key New Issues and Findings from the Primary Research not covered in the Literature Review	78
<u>Bibliography</u>	79

Glossary of Key Terms and Acronyms used in this Dissertation

ACS&S	Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNP	British National Party
CEG	Community Engagement and Governance
CLG	(Department of) Communities and Local Government
Council	Parish or Town Council in England
Councillor	An elected or co-opted representative of a Parish or Town Council in England
HM Government	Her Majesty's Government
LGA	Local Government Association
Local Council	A Parish or Town Council in England
Member	A councillor elected or co-opted as a representative of a Parish or Town Council
MP	Member of Parliament
NALC	National Association of Local Councils
OALC	Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
P	Political (in the First Questionnaire Responses)
PA	Political Affiliation (in the First Questionnaire Responses)
Principal Authority	Unitary, County, Borough or District level of local government
P&TC	Parish and Town Council
RN	Reference Number (in the First Questionnaire Responses)
SfE	Standards for England (formerly the Standards Board for England (SBE))

SLCC	Society of Local Councils Clerks
Standing Orders	Document covering the rules, regulations and procedures of Parish and Town Councils
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UOG	University of Gloucestershire

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and outlines the aims and objectives and the connection to the subject of Community Engagement and Governance (CEG).

1.1 Background

Parish and town councils¹ (P&TCs) were established by the Local Government Act 1894 and there are currently 9,920 in England. They vary in population from less than 100 to around 70,000 and vary in annual budgets from less than £100 to over £2 million (Communities and Local Government (CLG), online 2010). P&TCs comprise paid officers and (elected or co-opted) councillors, many of these councillors have political affiliation (Elwood et al, 1991) and therefore an association with political parties.

CEG is the study of ways in which agencies such as local councils² deliver services, engaging local communities with particular emphasis on aspects of governance, community engagement and management (University of Gloucestershire (UOG), 2010). P&TCs with politically affiliated councillors and the association with political parties may have a significant impact on

¹ The only difference between a parish and a town council is that a town council has decided to be known as a town as opposed to a parish (Electoral Commission, online 2010)

² Local Councils include parish, town, community and neighbourhood councils (Electoral Commission, online 2010)

these issues and therefore a link and relevance to the academic study of CEG. Hence they are the subject focus for this dissertation.

1.2 Author's Interest in the Study

The author is currently employed in a town council as the clerk, with all councillors being politically affiliated, and the council run along political lines i.e. according to political majority. All the councillors are members of a particular political group; the majority group hold all the Chair and Vice-Chair posts on committees which are appointed by the council. The councillors tend to vote in their political groups on issues. The council also has a political leader, who is appointed by the council and is also the leader of the majority political group. The leader of the council has no delegated powers, but offers a link between the majority group views and the council's policy direction and decision making.

The latest edition of the Governance Toolkit for P&TCs³ (2009, p64) states:

“The operation of political groups is becoming more of a feature within parish councils, but it is worth repeating that it is NALC policy that party politics should have no place in parish councils. Parish Councillors are there to serve their community as members of the community, and should not be sidetracked by party political issues”

³ The toolkit is produced as a partnership between the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), Standards for England (SfE) (formerly the Standards Board for England (SBE)) and the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors (ACS&S) and endorsed by the Local Government Association (LGA)

No evidence is offered in support of the above quote, and it is this plus the author's personal interest, conversations with colleagues within the sector who have strong views on P&TCs, and the involvement of political parties that inspire this research.

1.3 Hypotheses

This research begins with two hypotheses, which Robson (2009, p53) defines as "having a provisional, or tentative, explanation of what is going on", more significantly he also recognises that (2009, p53) "thinking in this way can do nothing but good". So the hypotheses on which this research is based are:

"Political parties are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs"

and

"Political parties should play no part in the operation of P&TCs"

The researcher intends to either reject the above hypotheses by finding evidence that contradicts them or support them by presenting evidence that confirms them. This is significantly more important with the author's personal interest.

1.4 Aim

The overall aim of the research is to answer the question:

- What is the role of political parties in P&TCs?

1.5 Objectives

To achieve the aim, the following objectives will be addressed:

- To establish the extent of the politicisation of P&TCs;
- To establish the positive and negative effects political parties have on P&TCs;
- To conduct a comparative study of an illustrative sample of political/non-political councils;
- To complete a SWOT analysis of the politicisation of P&TCS.

1.6 Research Methodology

This will be based on Walliman's (2009, p37) definition that "Research is a systematic investigation of a question...based on critical analysis of relevant evidence". The methods of primary and secondary research used to achieve the aim and objectives and confirm or reject the hypotheses are at Chapter 3 (Methodology) and include:

(a) Literature Review

The literature review is secondary research and is a critical analysis and review of what has been published on the subject using academic literature,

journals, practice reports, studies, practice documents, party political documents and central and local government documents. The research will be undertaken with an awareness of and comment on the reliability of evidence.

The amount and variation of literature available, and the limitation of this study, will mean that the selection of suitable, appropriate material will be of significant importance to the research study. The literature review forms Chapter 2.

(b) Questionnaires, Comparative Study and Interviews

A number of questionnaires will be designed and constructed to conduct primary research, along with a comparative study and interviews to achieve the overall aim, objectives and to either confirm or reject the hypotheses. The methodology section (chapter 3) presents and justifies the research methods and the results are set out in Chapter 4.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has explained that the dissertation is to establish the role played by political parties in P&TCs. The next chapter will critically analyse, evaluate and review literature relevant to the research aim and objectives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. Introduction

According to Hart (2007, p1) the literature review is a key element of any research project and is “important because without it you will not acquire an understanding of your topic, of what has already been done on it...and what the key issues are”. This review will investigate and set out existing relevant academic and practitioner research about political parties and their impact and influence upon P&TCs.

2.1 Political Parties in Local Government

Kingdom (2003, p277) argues that any political movement can describe itself as a party, but in a democracy political parties are “associations with a common set of beliefs and goals, and aiming to take office by constitutional means”. The beginnings of modern day political parties in central government go back to the seventeenth century (Kingdom 2003), the number registered with the Electoral Commission (Online, 2011) has now grown to over 390 with the majority being single issue parties, e.g., Henley Residents Association, Independent Loughton Residents Association.

It was not until the local government re-organisation of 1974 that they became a feature in local government (Jones et al 1994). Young and Davies (1990), in a study of the politics in local government, suggest that the 1974 re-organisation appeared to have stimulated growth in political parties in P&TCs with the emergence of larger councils able to provide more services

and exert increased influence. However, in 1991, Ellwood et al (1992) conducted a survey of 1,000 councils in England, representing 12.25% of P&TCs at that time, which showed that P&TCs remain largely non-political.

Table 1 – Political Affiliation of 1000 Councils by Council Size Surveyed in 1991 (Ellwood et al 1992, p30)

	All Councils	1991 Population Size						
		Below 500	501-1,000	1,001-2,500	2,501-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-20,000	Over 20,000
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Councils whose members declare political affiliation	10	<1	2	7	20	51	82	94
Councils run along political lines	4	0	0	2	8	20	47	69

The survey found that only 10% of councils reported that their members declared party political affiliation and more interestingly only 4% considered they were run along political lines, i.e. according to political majority. It is one of the aims of this study to investigate those councils who declare members with political affiliation but do not consider the councils to be run along political lines, and how that fits in with the decision making processes and governance of the council.

Ellwood et al (1992) also found that the political activity tended to be more widespread in town and successor councils¹, where 34% were run along political lines with 67% declaring political affiliation. It is significant that this figure rose to 69% run along political lines and 94% declaring political affiliation for those councils with populations over 20,000 with the associated larger budgets and services.

Woods et al (2002) undertook a study of elections to local councils in the 1998 to 2000 electoral cycles. The main finding with regards to political parties was that the likelihood of contested elections rises where there is a higher ratio of electors to seats and in larger councils which linked to party political contestation.

It is acknowledged in the Governance Toolkit for P&TCs (2009) that political parties are now becoming more and more a feature of P&TCs; no explanation is offered for this comment but one theory was offered by Coulson (1999), a senior lecturer in local government at the University of Birmingham, and is still valid with the present day move to unitary authorities in many parts of the country. Coulson (1999) observed that re-organisation and some new all-purpose unitaries in England meant that many district councils disappeared and this gave added importance to P&TCs.

The perceived spread of political parties in P&TCs may also be as a result of being the closest tier of government to the community, at the grass roots

¹ Successor Councils replaced, with the same boundaries, certain urban districts and municipal boroughs following the Local Government re-organisation in 1974

level, and the Coalition Government's policy of decentralisation and a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people (HM Government, Online, 2010), e.g., The Localism Bill and the Big Society. More recently, interest in P&TCs has grown to the point that the Communities and Local Government (CLG) department have, for the first time, issued statistical data on P&TCs, showing that they are responsible for over £356 million of locally raised taxes (CLG, online 2010). This amount may also attract the attention of political parties keen to have an influence at the local level over budgets and services.

2.2 Councillors and the Political Parties

It was recognised by Haberis and Prendergast (2007) in a review of the UK literature with regards to incentives and barriers to becoming and remaining a councillor that there is a relative lack of research about the P&TC tier of government in general and also a lack of systematic data. This study is intended to fill some of that gap in terms of the politicisation of P&TCs and the role the political parties play.

Many of the larger political parties offer guidance to individuals aspiring to become councillors for their individual parties, the larger parties, e.g., Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat, also have a dedicated councillor's association offering advice on being a councillor. The guidance reflects the views of Leach et al (1996, p72) in that it offers itself as "a source of 'political education' within the wider government system".

P&TCs also provide an opportunity for the aspiring politician to gain political experience and useful skills in public speaking; debating and problem solving and each of the larger political parties acknowledge this in the advice to potential councillors. This may offer one reason why political parties are becoming more of a feature within P&TCs. As recognised by Leach et al (1996, p73):

The “local community is the well-spring of democracy and citizenship; it is out of local politics that the legitimacy and viability of broader government systems grows. Local government, therefore, is an expression of the most natural and fundamental political identities”.

A fundamental question to be asked of party political councillors in P&TCs is whose views they represent, the political party, their own or the community who elected them or what balance of these. The argument could be put forward that they are elected under a political party banner, and therefore, the electorate are aware of the implications of this and its potential impact on the governance of the council and the decisions to be taken.

Gyfford (1991, p158) recognises the difficulties faced by councillors elected under a party political banner and argues that “councillors in political life are subject to numerous pressures from a variety of different sources”. Being members of political parties and the associated hierarchal organisation, one of the pressures could be political from within the party or group to vote in a particular way. This is acknowledged by Copus (2004, p2) in that “[Political] Parties touch every facet of political life and are involved, to one degree or

another, in guiding and influencing the shape, nature and direction of our local communities”.

More significantly, Copus (2004, p3) goes on to recognise that:

[The political] “party and more specifically the party group, is less about re-presenting citizens’ views in the council and more about filtering out the views, preferences and needs of citizens which do not accord with its own political frame of reference, beliefs and assessment of the common good”.

This view is one where the political party councillors are representing the party itself and the views, aspirations and wishes of the community only when it is in line with the party. This could offer some explanation and differences between those P&TCs that recognise themselves as being run along political party lines, and those that have councillors who are elected under a party political banner but do not see the council as being run along political party lines.

2.3 The Pros and Cons of Political Parties in Local Councils and Government

Wilson and Game (2006) offer pros and cons of party politics in local government and that it offers more candidates and fewer uncontested seats and therefore greater political legitimacy. They go on (2006, p317) that “politics, properly understood, is at the very heart of what local government is necessarily about”. And also suggest that with political parties, the

community are aware of the views and policy objectives of the parties rather than non-political representatives whose motives, policy objectives and views may be left unspecified. This would imply that with political parties the community know what they are voting for and what they will get when they elect the councillors as opposed to the unknown with those who are not affiliated to political parties.

Wilson and Game (2006) offer the argument that political parties in local government could have a negative impact as those not wishing to join a political party may be excluded from areas of local community life, e.g., less public involvement. From a citizen point of view, this also raises the issue of those electors who do not wish to follow a particular political party being excluded if there are no alternative options. A more significant point raised by Wilson and Game (2006) is reduced local democracy, arguing that councillors are “disciplined” into voting with their party, regardless of their personal convictions or judgement. This again could be argued that the councillors are representing the party view irrespective of the community views, but a counter argument is that the community voted the party in and therefore the party would represent the majority view.

However, Copus (2004, p114) offers a differing and significant view of the party group system in that “the party group system in its rawest form responds to the needs of government and decision-making rather than to the representation of local opinion”. The structural support of political parties can have recognisable benefits. Bevan (2003, p26), in a study into new P&TCs in urban areas, offers support for political parties. Discussing the fragility of a

new local council and the pressures on the Chair, he records that “it was felt that, since the new council lacked the established structure of the support of a local political party, this placed an increased burden on the Chair”

Bevan (2003, p26) also highlights the issues of an apolitical council and the problems it could face with active local political parties wishing to become increasingly involved:

“One respondent highlighted the apolitical nature of their local council in spite of the diversity of political views represented by individual members of the council. However, this respondent also noted that, as a group of residents, campaigning for the local council, they had to fend off attempts to manipulate the process by local political parties”.

Byrne (1985) offers an argument against political parties in local government, in that the existence of them may have an adverse effect upon electoral participation. His point is that should one party exert a stranglehold on an authority then voters in such “one-party states” might see an election as a foregone conclusion.

Table 2 overleaf shows a brief summary of the pros and cons of political parties that were highlighted in this section.

Table 2 – Brief Summary of the Pros and Cons of Political Parties in Local Councils/Government

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More candidates and fewer uncontested seats, leading to greater political legitimacy (Wilson and Game, 2006) • Offer an established structure (Bevan, 2003) • Policy objectives and views are known (Wilson and Game 2006) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less public involvement (Wilson and Game, 2006) • Do not respond to local opinion (Copus, 2004) • Reduced local democracy (Wilson and Game, 2006) • Attempt to get involved by manipulation (Bevan, 2003) • Possible exclusion for some of the community (Wilson and Game, 2006) • May have an adverse effect upon electoral participation (Byrne, 1985)

2.4 The Influence of National Politics

Copus (2004, p179) acknowledges and highlights the link and issues which can occur between political parties at the local level, the national level and the overall structure within which it operates:

“Local politics is prevented from having an independent existence from national politics, not only by the structure of British governance, but by political culture and role played at the local level by political parties”.

It is debatable as to whether national politics really has a place or indeed apply at the local level, but political parties may exacerbate this purely by

their existence and the obvious link with national politics and parties by bearing the same political banner. Kingdom (2003, p605) takes it one step further when discussing the local political environment and argues that “local electoral behaviour often betrays the centralism within British politics, with voters often casting a judgement on central government”. This implies that councillors who are not affiliated to the central government political parties could avoid this link and offer the community a viable alternative by concentrating on local issues that affect the community.

Pratchett and Wilson (1996, p66) offer an alternative view in that parties play a major role in stimulating public interest through election campaigning and facilitating electoral choice by distilling issues for public presentation. Without the political parties it could be argued that some issues would never be brought forward into the public arena for discussion and debate.

However, as recently as December 2009, it was recognised by Brodie et al (2009), in a study into understanding participation, that political party membership at the national, regional and local level was in decline and had been for a number years. They noted (2009, p8) that “people are turning away from participation in “traditional” or “formal” politics, via the ballot box and through membership of political parties”, Jones et al (2010) offer voting apathy and competition with non-political interests such as leisure activities, television and interest groups for the decline. This is significant in the argument about the participatory role in elections that political parties play allied to the major role in stimulating public interest.

2.5 Summary

The literature review has outlined relevant research within the constraints of this study into the role of political parties in P&TCs and revealed the following:

- A “political party” is an association of people with a common set of beliefs, aiming to take office by constitutional means;
- Political parties became a feature in P&TCs following the 1974 re-organisation and the introduction of larger P&TCs but there is a lack of systematic data on the politicisation of P&TCs;
- The 1991 survey by Ellwood et al (1992) showed that P&TCs were mainly non-political but there is a perception that political parties are spreading within P&TCs;
- There are P&TCs where members are affiliated to political parties but do not consider the council to be political;
- Political party membership is in decline;
- Central Government are showing more of an interest in P&TCs and with political parties voters may cast a judgement on central government instead of local issues;
- It is questionable whose views the politically affiliated member will represent; the party or the community;

- The community know what they will get with politically affiliated members but the members may be subject to many outside pressures;
- Political parties encourage debate and active involvement in local issues and the ballot box but not in areas with political stronghold;
- P&TCs are used by the major parties as a source of political education for aspiring politicians;
- Political parties offer an established structure with support for members that could have recognisable benefits;

This chapter has highlighted strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) associated with political parties, and an analysis is at appendix 1. These will form the basis for the primary research.

The next chapter will present, justify and explain the research methodology.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3. Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the choice, appropriateness, relevance and application of the research methods used to undertake the primary research and how the information was processed. It also confirms the research issues based on the SWOT analysis of the literature review (see appendix 1), explains the ethical considerations and the limitations of the primary research.

3.1 Research Issues

The hypotheses on which the research is based are:

“Political parties are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs”

and

“Political parties should play no part in the operation of P&TCs”

The literature review and the subsequent SWOT analysis (see appendix 1) helped to formulate the following research issues for the primary research:

- To investigate the roles, negative and positive, played by political parties in P&TCs, and examine whether they are better or worse for the community;

- Are political parties becoming more of a feature within P&TCs? Based against the 1991 survey by Ellwood et al;
- To investigate whether political parties help or hinder the internal processes and workings of P&TCs;
- To examine whether members with political affiliation represent the party or the community and determine whether they are prone to more outside pressures or conflict;
- To investigate whether political parties increase debate and involvement at the ballot box;
- Whether the SWOT analysis based on the literature review (see appendix 1) reflects reality

3.2 Research Methods

(a) Secondary Research

The literature review in chapter 2 identified and extracted pertinent and relevant information that currently exists. This secondary research was critically reviewed and provided the basis for a SWOT analysis (see appendix 1) and the research issues.

(b) Primary Research

Primary research involves the collection of original, new information and data by direct, detached observation in the real world which is undisturbed by any

intermediary interpreter (Walliman 2009). It is intended to use a combination of methods to explore the research questions, which Mason (2002, p190) describes as a “triangulated approach”. However, the words of caution offered by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p199) are recognised in that “one should not adopt a naively optimistic view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture”.

More specifically, primary research involves quantitative and qualitative research techniques; Silverman (2007) recognises that there is no simple distinction between the two and goes on that both have their limitations.

Quantitative research collects and analyses facts and figures, it aims to be unobtrusive and unbiased; to find representative results and give statistical rigour to the research (Walliman 2009), however Silverman (2007) rightly advises to be aware of validity and reliability. Qualitative research is about exploring attitudes, opinions and views and aims to increase understanding. Unlike quantitative data, which can be measured, qualitative data is generally expressed in words rather than numbers and consequently cannot be analysed by mathematical means (Walliman 2009).

3.3 Choice of Primary Research Methods

(a) Structured Questionnaire

The first part of the primary research was the use of a structured questionnaire (see appendix 3) which provided both quantitative and

qualitative data. It was a simple and straightforward questionnaire with short questions in order to enhance the response rate (Walliman, 2009) and minimise the effort required of the respondent. To further enhance the response rate it also included a covering letter explaining the reasoning behind the questionnaire and appreciation for completing it (Walliman 2009). The closed precise nature of the majority of questions resulted in quantifiable data enabling easy comparison and logging of results, and the questions used were intended to give a range of data linked to the aim, objectives and research issues. Two questions sought the opinion of the respondent; whether they felt the council was political and an opportunity for their comment of political parties and P&TCs. Importantly, it also identified those P&TCs willing to take part in a more detailed, qualitative, questionnaire.

As suggested by Bell (2005), a pilot of the questionnaire was trialled. This included 20 P&TC clerk colleagues and 10 fellow university P&TC clerk students, it was aimed at clerks to P&TCs as a way-in to the council but also as they were “a type similar to that of the intended recipient” (Walliman, 2009, p282). The pilot questionnaire also included a list of questions (see appendix 2) to test for clarity, ambiguity, ease of understanding and the time taken to complete. As the questionnaire played a very important part in the primary research, it was essential that the questionnaire was easy to complete but also still provided the data to assist in testing the hypotheses and addressing the research issues, aim and objectives.

Feedback from the pilot included:

“We are not political so I haven’t filled it in”

“I liked the opportunity to have the information fed back”

“I felt the term “political leader” could mean different things to different people and could be ambiguous to some”

These and other comments helped to improve the questionnaire in terms of eliminating ambiguity and increasing clarity. More importantly, the comments assisted in clarifying that it was imperative that all P&TCs, whether political or not, completed the questionnaire to gain data on the politicisation or not of P&TCs.

As advised by Walliman (2009), thought was taken over the professional presentation and length of the questionnaire to encourage responses (see appendix 3), and careful consideration was given to the layout of the questionnaire to enable easier processing of the information from the completed forms. The covering letter and the questionnaire also confirmed that all responses would be treated confidentiality.

In order to reach as many P&TCs as possible from across the whole of the country, the questionnaire was sent to the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) as they had kindly agreed to distribute to the other 36 county associations asking them to send to their P&TCs. However, not all

P&TCs are members of their association and to ensure a wider distribution as possible, it was also posted on the SLCC internet based forums. The forums are for all members of the SLCC to exchange views, information and seek advice on issues affecting P&TCs.

(b) Structured Qualitative Questionnaire

The second stage of the primary research included a second questionnaire (see appendix 4) to gain additional information for the comparative study. The questions were more detailed than the first questionnaire and based on the research issues. Following a pilot with 6 P&TC clerk colleagues, it was sent to an illustrative sample of 6 P&TC clerks, who had indicated in the first questionnaire a willingness to complete it, based on size, geographical location and included 2 each of the following P&TCs:

- (i) *Those that have politically affiliated councillors and are run along political lines***
- (ii) *Those that have politically affiliated councillors and are not run along political lines***
- (iii) *Those that do not have any politically affiliated councillors are not run along political lines***

As with the first questionnaire, it was accompanied by a covering letter (see appendix 4) and was compiled with care and consideration, taking into account the issues raised at 3.3(a) above.

The research topic did generate significant interest not only amongst the clerks to P&TCs but also councillors, some of whom had completed the first questionnaire mainly from the smaller parishes that had no clerk.

The responses to the first questionnaire were analysed and are included in the data presented in Chapter 4. The comparative study from the second questionnaire is at appendix 5.

(c) Semi-Structured Open-Ended Style Interviews

It was the author's intention to really get beneath the skin of the research topic and to help in achieving that, it was planned to conduct semi-structured open-ended style interviews to gain as much appropriate data as possible.

This style of interview was selected as the open ended interview is seen as the gold standard of qualitative research (Silverman 2006), however it is acknowledged that it also gives the freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her (Bell 1999) and not necessarily the researcher. However, it does offer greater freedom to explore specific avenues of enquiry (Kitchen and Tate, 2000).

The interviews were to be with councillors from a range of P&TCs, practitioners and representatives from political party associations and also local, regional and national organisations within the sector. The interviews were to centre on the overall aim, objective and the research issues. However, due to the considerable and unexpected response to the first questionnaire, the overall data gained from both questionnaires, and the

limitations and constraints of both time and word count of this research, interviews were not completed.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The significant responses of 420, which equates to just over 4.2% of the 9,920 P&TCs in England, to the first questionnaire were overwhelming and whilst they provided a logistical problem, it was seen as a good problem that the study had generated so much interest. Of noteworthy assistance in the collection of the data was arranging a designated and specific email address for responses and any comments or feedback, although a small number were sent back to the author's work and personal email addresses. A small number of the responses were also sent back by post.

An excel spreadsheet was used for the logging of all responses and made the analysis of the closed precise questions from the first questionnaire easy and straight forward. Any additional comments and the responses to the second questionnaire were analysed by extracting recurring themes, issues and any significant differences of opinions.

3.5 Limitations of the Research Methodology

The initial idea of two questionnaires and also the interviews with various councillors, representatives and practitioners from within the sector appeared optimistic following the significant and, in the author's experience of the P&TC sector, unexpected response of 420 to the first questionnaire. A response such as this, although most welcome, meant that the analysis was

very time consuming and within the time constraints of this study meant that something had to be left out. This was the interviews as the author felt that the data gained through the questionnaires was sufficient for the time constraint and word count of this research.

The first questionnaire relied on the good nature of others in its distribution, which is not ideal and it was difficult to judge how many P&TCs were sent the questionnaire. It was not possible therefore to assess the response return rate compared to the number sent out, but only the responses compared to the overall number of P&TCs. It appears from the county geographical spread (see Figure 2 in chapter 4) of responses that either not all county associations sent the questionnaire to the P&TCs in their area, or none of the P&TCs in some counties responded.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has explained the research methodology used, why and the appropriateness to gain the data required to achieve the aim and objectives of the study and to investigate the research issues. It has also detailed the response rate and the limitations of the research methodology.

The next chapter provides analysis and evaluation of the primary research, offering critical discussion and commentary.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

4. Introduction

This chapter analyses and evaluates the results and findings from the primary research, and offers critical discussion and commentary on the results. It also links the results to the literature review findings at chapter 2, and offers a comparison between the two. Significantly, this chapter forms the basis of, and links together with, the conclusions and recommendations at chapter 5.

4.1 First Questionnaire Results

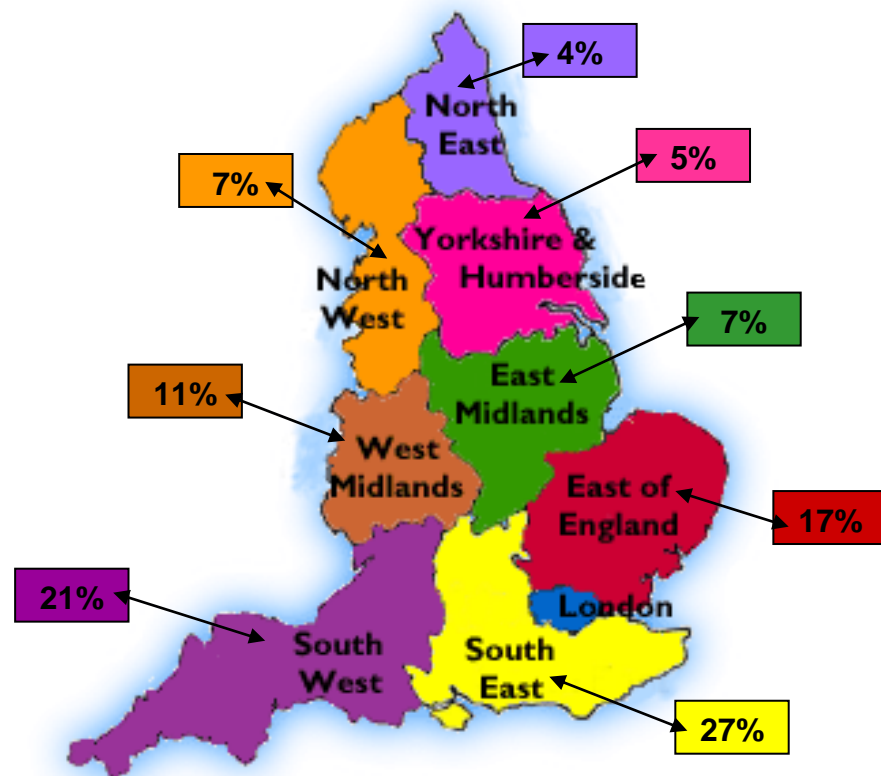
(a) Responses

During November and December 2010, 420 responses were received to the first questionnaire which equates to around a 4.2% response rate of the 9,920 P&TCs (CLG, online 2010) in England. 97% of the responses were completed by the clerk (or variant titles thereof but referred to as the clerk in this study) to the councils and the remainder by the Chairman or a councillor, 95% were returned by email and 5% by post.

It was clear that some responses were agreed by the Council, and others were completed by an individual with the caveat that the respondent's identity remains confidential, as indicated in the covering letter and the questionnaire.

The responses covered all regions in England (see Figure 1 overleaf) but not all counties (see Figure 2 overleaf and appendix 6). It is therefore recognised that the results are an illustrative sample of P&TCs.

Figure 1 – Map (Courtesy of National Council for Voluntary Organisations, online 2011) Showing the Geographical Representation of responses by English Region



The figure shows that response returns from the South East region were the highest, closely followed by the South West; it is not clear why there was such a variation in responses across the regions (comment on this is offered at paragraph 3.5 of chapter 3). When broken down by Shire County (Figure 2 overleaf) it shows that Hampshire (South East Region) and Norfolk (East of England Region) both returned 11% of the responses. A breakdown of the number of responses from each county is at appendix 6.

The lowest percentage of the response returns were from the North East Region, with 4% of the responses, however, it should be noted that it only

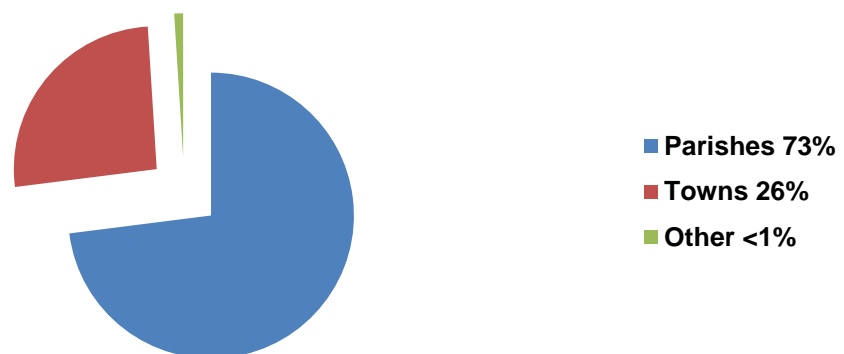
has two counties (Northumberland and Durham) (see Figure 2 below) and one of those was responsible for all the responses from that region.

Figure 2 – Map (Courtesy of ITravelUK, online 2011) Showing the Geographical Representation of Responses by County



Figure 3 below shows the percentage of respondents broken down into parish, town¹ and other², the figures show that the overwhelming majority of the responses are from parishes. It was intended to show how representative the responses were in relation to the overall number of parishes, towns and others but the only statistical information available is the overall number of P&TCs as 9,920 (see paragraph 4.1(a) above).

Figure 3 – Showing the Percentage of Respondents from Parishes, Towns and “Others”



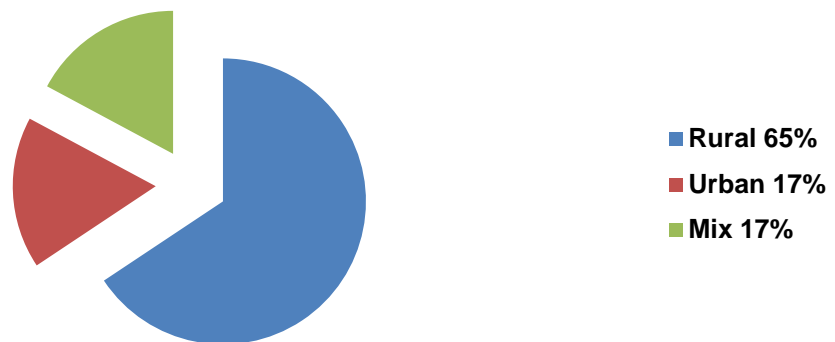
According to Jones (2007), town councils are often larger than parishes, the results agree with this observation; only 6% of the parishes have populations over 10,000, with the largest parish having a population of 25,000. The smallest town has a population of 2,000, but the majority, 80%, have populations of 10,000 or more.

¹ The only difference between a parish and a town council is that a town council has decided to be known as a town as opposed to a parish (Electoral Commission, online 2010)

² The “other” category includes councils who have decided to name themselves as a “community” council, and parish meetings who are not classed as “councils”

The average town population was 18,766 and the average parish population 2,823 which also confirms that town councils tend to be larger than parishes.

Figure 4 – Showing the Percentage of Responses by Rural, Urban and a Rural/Urban Mix



It should be noted that the category of rural, urban or mixed for each response was determined by the individual completing the questionnaire, as they would be in a position to offer such an opinion.

Figure 4 above and Figure 3 on the previous page indicate that the majority of responses were from rural parishes. This was confirmed in the results, with 60% of all responses being from parishes that were rural, but this rose significantly to 81% of all the responses from parishes being rural.

Table 3 overleaf breaks down the above figures into parish and town.

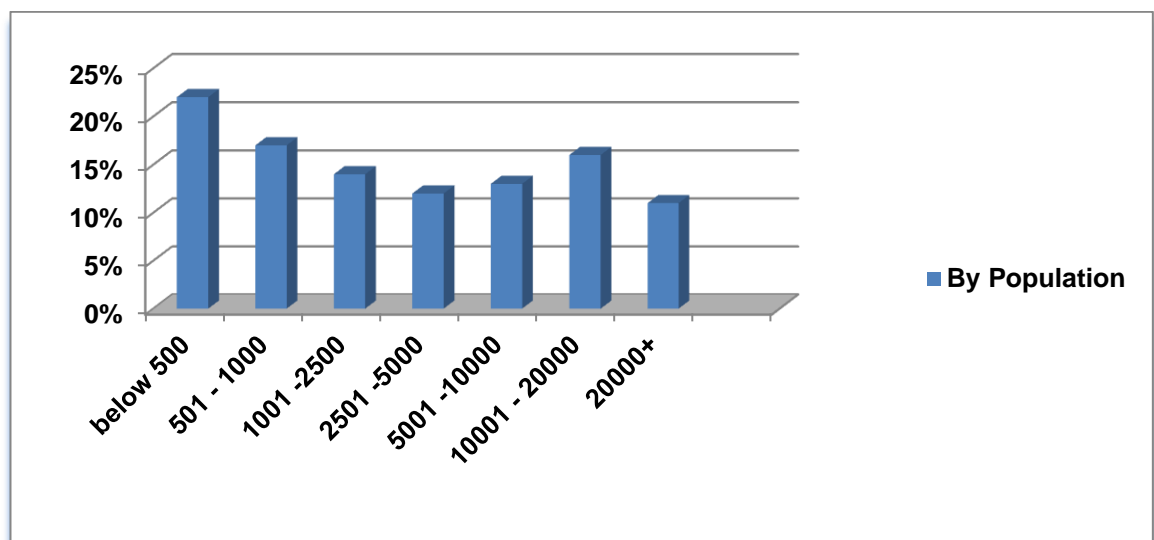
Table 3 – Showing the Percentage of Responses by Parish/Town, Rural/Urban/Mix

	Parish	Town
Rural	81%	20%
Urban	8%	42%
Mix	10%	38%

It is worth noting that the majority of parishes tend to be rural and the majority of towns (80%) tend to be urban/mix.

The spread of responses by population showed:

Figure 5 – Showing the Percentage of Responses by Population



The category ranges used in the population analysis were the same as those in the 1991 survey (Ellwood et al, 1992) for comparison purposes at Figure 6

below and later in the analysis. The majority of responses were from the category with the smallest councils, and the fewest number from the category with the largest councils. The average population of all responses was 7,005. However, the overall responses give a good spread across the range of population categories.

(b) Politicisation

As explained in the literature review at chapter 3, a previous survey of the politicisation of P&TCs was completed in 1991 by Ellwood et al (1992).

Figure 6 below offers a comparison with the 1991 survey results.

Figure 6 – Showing the Percentage of Responses in Comparison with the 1991 Politicisation Survey Figures, Black = 1991 v Red = 2010

	All Councils	Population						
		Below 500	501-1,000	1,001-2,500	2,501-5,000	5,001-10,000	10,001-20,000	Over 20,000
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Councils whose members declare political affiliation	10	<1	2	7	20	51	82	94
	48	<1	19	32	57	82	92	98
Councils run along political lines	4	0	0	2	8	20	47	69
	19	0	0	2	0	24	49	82

In comparison to 1991, there has been a significant increase in both those councils whose members declare political affiliation, increased from 10% to 48%, and councils run along political lines, which have increased from 4% to 19%. The results do show that, as in 1991, councils run along political lines still tend to be at the medium/larger size council with populations over 5000. The increases are even more remarkable given that secondary research (see chapter 2) (Brodie et al, 2009) indicated that political party membership was in decline.

However, the councils whose members declare political affiliation have increased considerably across all the population sizes with the exception of those below 500. The only reduction is in the 2501 – 5000 population category for the councils run along political lines.

It is noticeable that political parties seem to have more involvement in the town councils, which tend to be larger, than the parish councils. This is highlighted below in Table 4:

Table 4 – Showing the Percentage of Responses by Parish/Town and Political Affiliation/Run along Political Lines

	Parish	Town
Political Affiliation	32%	93%
Run Along Political Lines	6%	59%

Councils with political affiliation vary in population from 500 to 70,000, with an average population of 12,759. Councils run along political lines vary from 1,150 to 70,000, with an average population of 20,302. These figures again confirm that political parties tend to be more involved and prevalent in larger parishes.

(c) An Appointed Leader

This was not covered in the 1991 survey, but the author's experience within the sector indicated that this was an issue than needed investigation and research. The results showed that 9% of all respondents had an appointed leader, this increased to 44% in councils with populations of over 20,000. The population variation in those councils with an appointed leader was from 6,200 to 70,000, with the average being 24,672.

Figure 7 – Showing the Percentages of Responses with an Appointed Leader by Political Party

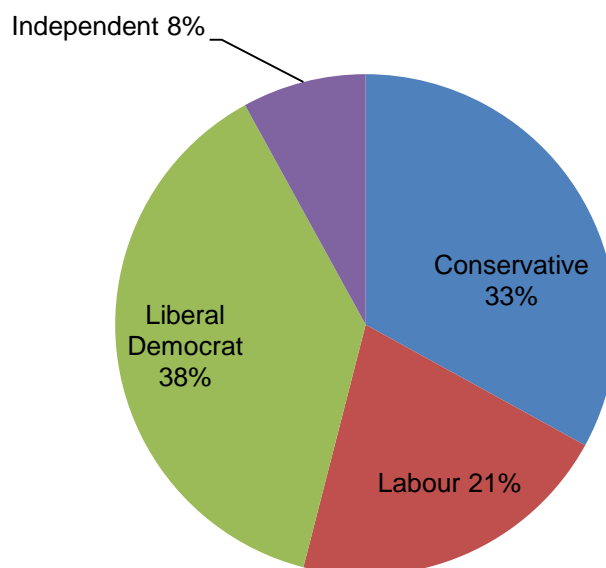
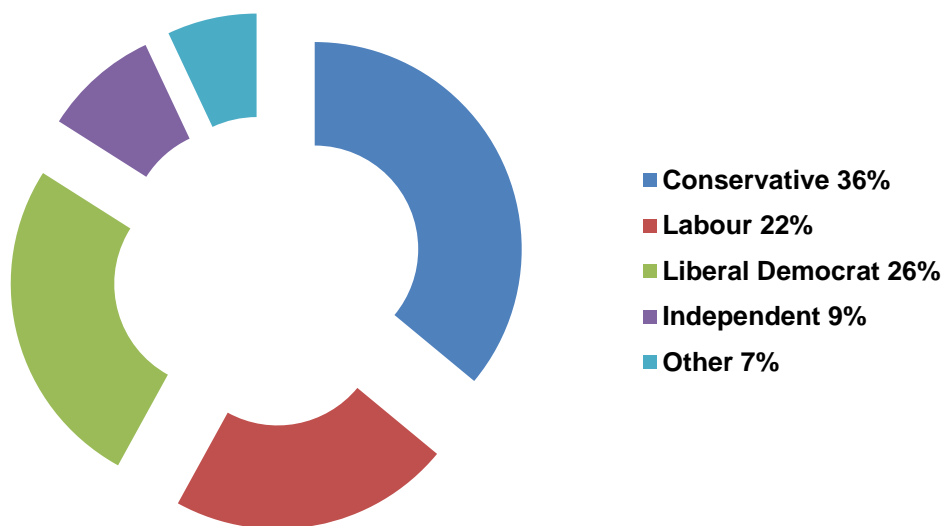


Figure 7 on the previous page clearly shows that the idea of an appointed leader³ is spread through all the major political parties at the P&TC level and is not specific to a particular party or group.

(d) Political Parties

Of the 48% of respondents who declared members with political affiliation, 5% did not specify the political party that members affiliated to. However, the vast majority of respondents who did specify a political party and the number of members in each indicated that they all had at least one member from one of the main three political parties: Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat.

Figure 8 – Showing the Percentage of Responses of Members by Political Party who declared Political Affiliation

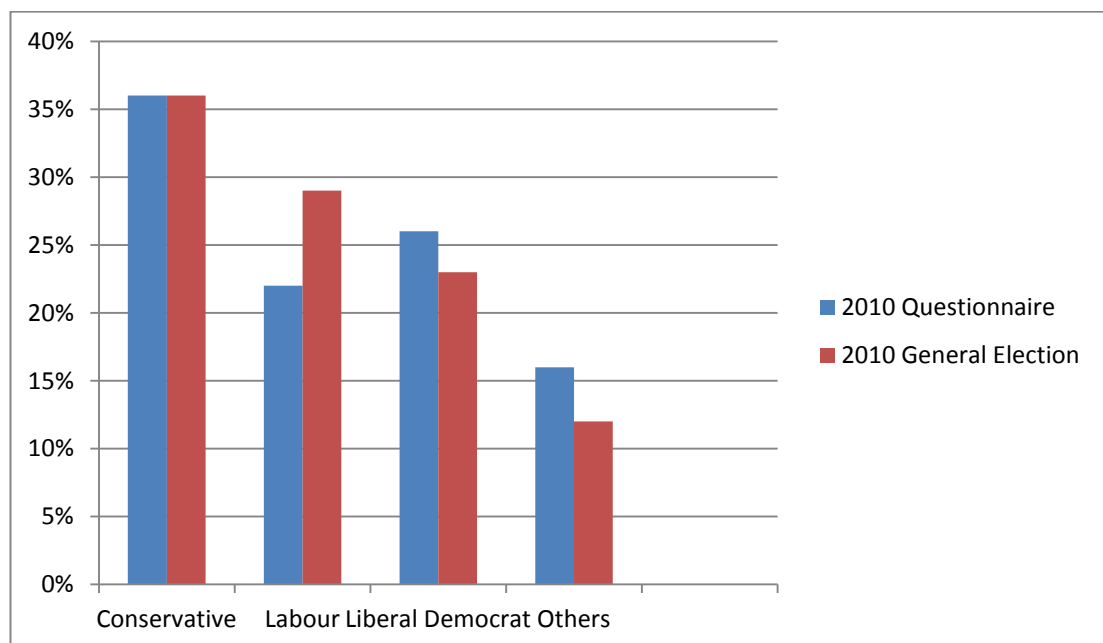


³ NALC advise (March 2006) that the appointment of a leader can only be used in the context of the LGA 2000 which does not apply to P&TCs. There is an argument by P&TCs that they can appoint a member to be an officer of the council without remuneration under s112 (5), LGA 1972, and use this for the leader appointment which is purely an administrative role with no executive or delegated powers.

The “other” category included members affiliated to the Green Party (31%), the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) (5%), the British National Party (BNP) (7%), Residents Associations or Groups from the specific parish or town (55%) and Labour & Co-operative (2%).

The literature review at chapter 2 indicated that there may well be a link between national politics and political parties at the P&TC level. Interestingly, the percentages at figure 8 are not too dissimilar to those at the last general election in 2010 (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), online 2011), the Conservative percentage is exactly the same. This is a matter that requires further investigation and research.

Figure 9 – Showing the Comparative Percentage Figures between the Political Parties in the Questionnaire Responses and the 2010 General Election



(e) Key Themes from General Comments

Question 10 on the questionnaire (see appendix 3), appended below for ease of reference, gave the respondent the opportunity to feedback comments on their views:

Are there any other comments you would like to make about parish & town councils (P&TCs) and political parties?

The 294 responses to this question, 70% of the total responses, were analysed under key themes and gave some interesting and significant data; they also added some new findings and issues. They offered comments and quotes to show a range of opinions and those shown are representative of the responses received. A summary of the more noteworthy responses are at appendix 7 and a selection of the key, more significant comments broken down into key themes follow below.

The respondent number (referred to as RN) is the author's reference for the response, politically affiliated councillors (referred to as PA) indicates that the response is from a council that has councillors who declare affiliation to a political party, and political council (referred to as P) indicates that the council is deemed to be political by the respondent, i.e., run along political lines according to political majority. It should also be noted that for identification purposes some of the words in the comments have been changed but do not impact on or affect the overall meaning, opinion or view.

(i) Principal Authorities

The influence and impact of party politics from principal authorities was evident, as shown by the comments below, whether the P&TCs were political or not, and covered all types; large, small, rural and urban. There was no evidence of this in the literature review at chapter 2:

“at times it appears to be an extension of the District and County, with their Councillors bringing their politics to the Council” (RN 10, PA – Yes, P – No)

“we are not political but suffer from the fall out of politics from the District Council” (RN 289, PA – Yes, P – No)

“Political – No, although we do from time to time get caught in party political crossfire with the Unitary Council” (RN 374, PA – Yes, P – No)

“politics is not necessarily bad, only disadvantageous when principal authority fights spill into town” (RN 101, PA – Yes, P – Yes) & (RN 102, PA – No, P – No)

It is worth noting that the above comments, and of all of those listed at appendix 7 under the principal authorities theme, have politically affiliated councillors. This indicates that political party politics from the principal authorities mainly impacts on those councils with politically affiliated councillors.

However, having an influence and impacting upon the P&TCs can also have a concerning and significant influence which may favour one P&TC over another:

“I look after 2 parishes, both have politically affiliated councillors but are not political. One is treated differently by the District as it has different party councillors than the district” (RN 306, PA – Yes, P – No)

“(The Parish Councils) PCs “brought in” services are affected by the leaderships of district and county councils” (RN 78, PA – No, P – No)

The last comment is even more significant when the respondent has indicated that the P&TC has neither politically affiliated councillors or is political, although the respondent does explain further that:

“I do happen to know some of my Members’ affiliations, and it does help sometimes to know where they are coming from and how I should approach them about issue X or Y” (RN 78, PA – No, P - No)

(ii) Elections

The literature review at chapter 2 highlighted that political parties encourage debate and active involvement in local issues and at the ballot box, which the following comments confirm:

“I hate political parties but it does work to provide enough candidates to stand at election time” (RN 42, PA – Yes, P – No)

“many political town and parish councillors frequently used the political party to pay for the nomination and campaigning and they are then given a platform to work from....useful if enabling more people to get involved in local councils” (RN 142, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

However, getting more involvement does not necessarily mean that the candidates will make good councillors, as one respondent recognises:

“...elected because “x” party not because they would be good councillors” (RN 42, PA – Yes, P – No)

Conversely, political parties at election time may also prove to be a hindrance for P&TCs:

“for the most part political parties are not too bad, but in the run-up to local (district/county) and national elections, when the canvassing goes under political banners, everybody is point scoring and fighting to promote their party in whatever way they can, and the parish council gets drawn in” (RN 163, PA – Yes, P – No)

It was also commented, interestingly from a respondent with no politically affiliated councillors, that the community know what they will get with political parties as indicated in the literature review at chapter 2:

“they (political parties) pay for leaflets at election time and it gives the electorate of those councils some clue about their candidates views” (RN 58, PA – No, P – No)

(iii) Officers of the Council

Although this topic never appeared in the secondary research, there was one specific comment worth highlighting:

“(Political Parties) give me clear policy and political leadership and is welcomed by the Town Clerk for that” (RN 115, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

This indicates a clear benefit of political parties in P&TCs from a clerk’s perspective.

(iv) Political Parties – Negative Comments

Concerns were expressed over the impact of political parties on the running of the Council:

“detrimental to it (the Council) being run in an effective manner and takes over too many hours and meetings being dominated by (political) party power struggles” (RN 346, PA – Yes, P – No)

“our “best” Councillor is denied access to Chairmanship of Committees and the Mayoral Role because she is not from the majority party” (RN 85, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

It was evident that, as in the literature review at chapter 2, it was questionable whether the councillor represents the community or the party:

“politics at this level can hinder decision making to the detriment of the community if Councillors feel they have to tow the party line” (RN 398, PA – Yes, P – No)

“the problem is when you have someone who wants to climb the political ladder at any cost, it can damage the community” (RN 98, PA – Yes, P – No)

“It is so obvious by action or in debate when the only purpose is to score a political point. There is no purpose or benefit to the community” (RN 125, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“a PC dominated by one political group cannot claim to truly represent the whole community” (RN 363, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“if people are very political then they stick together and vote the same, not always in the best interests of the people they represent” (RN 394, PA – Yes, P – No)

It was indicated that political parties stifled debate within the P&TC meetings and that there may be predetermination⁴:

“being political can dilute the democratic representation for the community. There is very little discussion at Council meetings, as matters have already been decided in group” (RN 69, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“there is little discussion at Council meetings as any vote is always lost by the X party (the opposition party)” (RN 377, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“decisions are frequently made in group meetings in private....this reduces debate among councillors and cuts out the valuable contributions other members from outside the political party can make” (RN 142, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

⁴ The Standards Board for England define predetermination as when “a councillor’s mind is closed to the merits of any arguments which differ from their own about a particular issue on which they are making a decision...the Councillor makes a decision on the issue without taking them all into account. If councillors are involved in decision making they should avoid giving the appearance that they have conclusively decided how they will vote at the meeting” (Standard Board for England, Online 2011).

(v) Political Parties – Positive Comments

There were far less positive comments than negative. Significantly, the majority of the positive comments were made by political P&TCs. This may indicate that those with political councils recognise the benefit as they work with the system and the non-political councils do not. However, there were some positive comments from those who were not political, and it must be recognised that all of those respondents with significant positive comments listed at appendix 7 do have political affiliation.

The following respondent from a council that was previously political but is not now, recognised a link between political parties and the business of the council, but more significantly that political parties offer openness in decision making:

“with political councils it is much easier to deal with the business of the council...working with an independent council is very difficult as the politics that are behind the decisions are cannot be dealt with openly” (RN 64, PA – Yes, P – No)

Other benefits appear to be that political parties’ politics are far easier to understand and they also offer clear policy direction and leadership:

“politics are far more easily understandable at party-politics level than community-politics level” (RN 97, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“it (party politics) ensures there is a democratic mandate. Gives clear policy and political leadership and is welcomed by the Town Clerk for that” (RN 315, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

The respondent below felt that having councillors with political affiliation acted as a resource to the P&TC in terms of time and expertise when responding to issues:

“having affiliation (political – members) has been really useful in gaining access to and help from political parties with the time and expertise to help draft telling responses to issues such as electoral division” (RN 213, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

The political party set-up also afforded a certain amount of discipline from councillors; whether this is a good thing or not is unclear:

“I seem to have less trouble with my councillors than other parishes....whether its because they are kept in line by their leaders” (RN 85, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

(vi) Political Parties – General Comments

There were a number of general comments on political parties; some were reflections on the structure and system of government:

“with the demise of the district and formation of a unitary, I can see the larger towns in X becoming more party political at the time of the next elections in 2013” (RN 74, PA – Yes, P – No)

“there should not be party politics at any level of local government, however until we have a system of government that facilitates that across the country then my preference is for political leadership” (RN 75, PA – Yes, P – No)

The issue of political parties putting the politics aside for the better of the community or wanting the same but working in different ways was also highlighted:

“the 2 political groups actually want very much the same for the town but would do it in different ways” (RN 116, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“generally speaking councillors want to do what’s best for their community irrespective of their political persuasion” (RN 138, PA – Yes, P – No)

However, the comments also highlighted a lack of knowledge of political parties, standing orders⁵, and the democratic rights of individuals:

“Our councillors are firmly anti-political allegiances and it is written into our standing orders that there will be no party political factions” (RN 142, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

(vii) Political – Concluding Comments

The comments under this theme were all from respondents who had politically affiliated councillors but were of the opinion that their P&TC was not run along political lines.

The respondent below highlighted a key link between the sizes of the P&TC having a bearing upon political affiliation, which was confirmed earlier by figure 6:

“it is different for the smaller parishes where the candidates are known to the majority of residents, but as the town or village gets bigger that personal affiliation tends to be lost and seems to be replaced by residents political affiliations” (RN 322, PA – Yes, P – No)

⁵ Standing Orders cover the rules, regulations and procedures of the council

(viii) National Politics

The literature review at chapter 2 highlighted a link between national politics and P&TC politics. Respondents under this theme were of the opinion that there is a clear link between national and P&TC politics:

“As is often the case in politics generally the local issues are of secondary consideration to residents’ primary opinions of how the national parties are doing” (RN 122, PA – Yes, P – No)

“The full council meetings now see debates mainly on policy and spending that are direct lifts of national political policy” (RN 126, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

The last comment is a concern with regards spending when considered in the context of P&TC funding, as they do not receive any funding from central government which is not the case with principal authorities.

(ix) Training

The literature review at chapter 2 identified that some of the larger political parties use P&TCs as a training ground for politicians of the future, the respondent below recognised this:

“I am aware of some P&TCs where the political parties use these councils to blood and train candidates for higher office e.g.: principal authorities and MPs (RN 170, PA – Yes, P – No)

A recent example of this is the Right Honourable Pat Glass MP, who was elected to the House of Commons in May 2010 to represent the North West

Durham constituency and previously served as a councillor on Lanchester Parish Council.

4.2 Second Questionnaire Results

The responses to the second questionnaire, as set out in paragraph 3.3(b) of the research methodology at chapter 3, are set out in appendix 5 as an illustrative comparative study between the councils.

The results, from clerks to P&TCs, confirm many of the opinions expressed in the first questionnaire.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has:

- Analysed the results from the primary research and offered critical commentary and discussion;
- Shown that the results have revealed many of the issues from the secondary research (literature review) at chapter 2 and a comparison of the key results is at appendix 8;
- Offered new issues and findings that were not apparent from the literature review, these are summarised at appendix 9;
- Offered evidence to support the summary and recommendations in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out conclusions brought together from the primary and secondary research evidence and links the conclusions to the research hypotheses, aim and objectives. It then offers a number of recommendations, directed to specific organisations and bodies, arising from the research study.

The conclusions and recommendations each address two areas, related to:

- The research approach and how it was undertaken;
- The politicisation of P&TCs.

5.2 Conclusions

The research aimed to investigate, critically analyse and evaluate the role of political parties within P&TCs and to either reject or support the hypotheses:

“Political parties are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs”

and

“Political parties should play no part in the operation of P&TCs”

The illustrative research findings have tested the hypotheses and have confirmed that political parties:

- Are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs; the research showed that 48% of councils surveyed had members who declared political affiliation compared to 10% in the 1991 survey, and 19% of councils were run along political lines compared to 4% in the 1991 survey;
- Should play a part in the operation of P&TCs, where political affiliation is declared and therefore is open and transparent; the research has shown that there were far less positive than negative views and opinions about political parties, from this it would be straightforward to argue they should play no part, however, that is not the full picture and they can and do offer a contribution, e.g. clear policy direction and leadership, resources in terms of time and expertise, a structure to provide candidates at elections, promotion of involvement and debate; many P&TCs would not receive these benefits from elsewhere. It is also significant that the majority of those who support the role of political parties in P&TCs are political councils; it could be argued that it is an issue of education or understanding for non-political councils. But the most significant and important point is that it is the electorate, the community, who are electing the politically affiliated councillors and it could be argued that there may be no viable alternative or option within the current system of local government at the P&TC level.

Additionally, the study also sought to determine the role of political parties in P&TCs and the research has shown:

- Politically affiliated members may represent the party over the community;
- Political parties encourage debate and active involvement in local issues;
- Major political parties use P&TCs as a source of political education for aspiring politicians;
- Politically affiliated members are subject to pressures outside the normal workings of P&TCs;
- Political parties give an established and supportive structure to members;
- Whether they are political or not, P&TCs are subject to political party influences from principal authorities;
- P&TCs have appointed leaders despite advice to the contrary from NALC;
- The political party make-up of P&TCs is similar to that of central government and has members from a wide variety of political parties.

The research has also provided the following:

- Contributed to the understanding of the role of political parties in P&TCs;

- Filled a gap in knowledge and updated research in the politicisation of P&TCs;
- Offered something new to the local government sector and the associated role in community engagement and governance

The aims and objectives of the study have been achieved by:

- Establishing the role, both negative and positive, of political parties in P&TCs;
- Establishing the extent of politicisation in P&TCs;
- Establishing the positive and negative effects political parties have on P&TCs;
- Conducting a comparative study between an illustrative sample of political/non-political councils, although this was not discussed in text due to the word count limitations of the study;
- Completing a SWOT analysis of the politicisation of P&TCs, and also offering a comparison with the literature review (see appendices 1 and 8).

5.3 Recommendations

This research has gone as far as it can within the limitations of the dissertation and has raised a number of significant and important issues that need consideration or further investigation and the following are offered:

(a) To Central Government

- Pass legislation so members of political parties have to declare such when standing for election at the P&TC level to show transparency to the public;
- Review the current system of governance and representation at the P&TC level, to ensure that it meets the aspirations and needs of communities and is fit for purpose in the Coalition Government's policy of decentralisation and its fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people e.g., The Localism Bill and the Big Society.

(b) To LGA

- Investigate further the relationship and role that principal authorities and their party politics have on the workings and operations of P&TCs.

(c) To NALC

- Further study and research is undertaken into the appointment and role of appointed leaders in P&TCs and any advice previously offered is reviewed.

(d) To All Training Providers involved with P&TCs

- Provide specific training courses for clerks working in P&TCs with political parties and politically affiliated members.

(e) To NALC/SLCC

- Accept that political parties have a role to play in P&TCs and they are present and spreading; and jointly review the NALC policy statement in the Governance Toolkit for P&TCs (2009, p64) that “party politics should have no place in parish councils”;
- Provide specific support, help and guidance for clerks on the role of political parties in P&TCs, and information to clerks to help them understand the political party set-up and system.

(f) To ILCM/NALC/SLCC/UOG - for further study

- To use this research as a basis for further, additional and more in-depth studies into:
 - why political parties are spreading within P&TCs;
 - the role of individuals who serve as members in P&TCs under no political banner but have political affiliation at another level of government;
 - the linkage and influences between party politics at the national, principal and P&TC level;
 - whether the current system of local government is able to offer viable and alternative options to the electorate and communities at the ballot box at the P&TC level;
 - councils where the members are politically affiliated but they deem themselves not to be run along political lines.

Literature Review SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More candidates and fewer uncontested seats giving greater political legitimacy (Wilson and Game, 2006) • P&TCs democratically elected as opposed to co-option where the electorate have no say on the individual (Woods et al, 2002) • The community know what they get with political parties are aware of motives and policy objectives (Wilson and Game, 2006) • The structural support of political parties can have recognisable benefits (Bevan, 2003) • Play a major role in stimulating public interest through election campaigning and bringing issues into the public arena – without them the issues may never have been brought forward (Pratchett and Wilson, 1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of systematic data on the politicisation of P&TCs (Haberis and Prendergast, 2007) • Political Party membership is in decline (Brodie et al, 2009) (Jones et al, 2010) • Politically affiliated members may represent the group or party views more than the community (Copus, 2004) • Could offer less public involvement – exclusion of the individual who does not support any political party, no alternative (Wilson and Game, 2006) • Politically affiliated members disciplined into voting with their group/party (Copus, 2004) • The party group system responds to the needs of government rather than the representation of local opinion (Copus, 2004) • Reduce electoral participation in political strongholds – election seen as a foregone conclusion and individuals don't bother to vote (Byrne, 1985) • May be linked into national politics and not focus on the local issues (Copus, 2004) (Kingdom, 2003)

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government are showing more of an interest in P&TCs (CLG, 2010) • The importance of P&TCs is increasing with the move to unitary authorities (Coulson, 1999) • They are the closest tier of local government to the community (CLG, 2010) • Central government policy of decentralisation and shift of power to the people (CLG, 2010) • Used as a training ground for aspiring politicians (Leach, 1996) • P&TCs are the well-spring of democracy and citizenship (Leach, 1996) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Party membership is in decline (this is also a weakness) (Brodie et al, 2009) (Jones et al, 2010) • Unclear as to whether politically affiliated members represent the party or community (Copus, 2004) • Politically affiliated members are subject to numerous pressures from a variety of sources (Gyfford, 1991) • Attempt to manipulate the political process (Bevan, 2003) • The community may use the ballot box as casting a judgement on central government and not local issues (Kingdom, 2003) • Individuals are turning away from participation in the traditional or formal politics via the ballot box (Brodie et al, 2009) (Jones et al, 2010)

Questions asked in the Pilot Questionnaire

1. How long did it take to complete?
2. Were the instructions clear?
3. Were any of the questions unclear or ambiguous? If so, will you say which and why?
4. Did you object to answering any of the questions?
5. In your opinion, has any major issue been omitted?
6. Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/attractive?
7. Any other comments? Or would you like to add anything?

Based on suggestions by Bell (2005, p147)

Dear Parish/Town Clerk,

Survey of Parish/Town Councils

My name is Dominic Stapleton and I am clerk to Didcot Town Council in South Oxfordshire. I am currently studying towards the University of Gloucestershire Community Engagement and Governance (CEG) degree and am now in my sixth (!) and final year.

I am working on a dissertation titled “The Role of Political Parties in Parish and Town Councils” as I am interested in finding out how widespread and what the role is of political parties in parish and town councils. **It is important that parish and town councils who are not political complete the survey to provide a picture of the spread (or not) of political parties.**

My reason for contacting you is to ask if you would assist me in my research. There has not been any specific research on this subject since a 1991 survey, and your response will help to build a picture of the politicisation of parish and town councils in 2010.

It would be much appreciated if you would please spare 5 to 10 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me, preferably by email to councilsurvey@hotmail.co.uk or by post to Town Clerk, Didcot Town Council, Britwell Road, Didcot OX11 7HN, marked private and confidential. I will happily provide a stamped addressed envelope. My telephone number is 01235 812637. **All information will be treated confidentially** and respondents will not be identified in the report, I do hope this assurance will encourage you to be honest when answering the questions. **Please return your response by the 30th November.**

Thank you for your help and for sparing the time to complete the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Stapleton
Town Clerk
Didcot Town Council
3rd November 2010

PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS IN ENGLAND
A STUDY INTO THE ROLE AND EXTENT
OF POLITICAL PARTIES

All Responses will be treated confidentially

SECTION 1: COUNCIL DETAILS

1. What is the name of the council where you are employed?

2. What is your job title?

3. What is the population of the parish/town that the council covers?

4. What county is the council in?

5. Do you consider the parish/town to be rural, urban or a mix of both?

SECTION 2: THE COUNCILLORS

6. How many councillors does the council have?

7. Do any of the councillors have any publicly recognised political affiliation?
If yes, how many and which political parties?

SECTION 3: POLITICAL PARTIES

8. Do you consider the council to be political? If yes, in what way is the council political?

9. Does the council have an appointed political leader?

10. Are there any other comments you would like to make about parish & town councils and political parties? (Please continue on a separate sheet of paper if required)

11. Would you be willing to participate in an additional survey with more detailed questions on the workings of your council? If yes, please provide a contact name and email address

12. If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please supply a contact name and email address

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Dear Parish/Town Clerk,

The Role of Political Parties in Parish and Town Councils

My name is Dominic Stapleton and I am clerk to Didcot Town Council in South Oxfordshire. I am currently studying towards the University of Gloucestershire Community Engagement and Governance (CEG) degree and am now in my sixth (!) and final year.

I am working on a dissertation titled “The Role of Political Parties in Parish and Town Councils” as I am interested in finding out how widespread and what the role is of political parties in parish and town councils. **It is important that parish and town councils who are not political complete the questionnaire to provide their views on the role of political parties.**

You had previously indicated that you would be willing to participate in an additional survey and that is my reason for contacting you. There has not been any specific research on this subject since a 1991 survey, and your response will help to build a picture of the role of political parties within parish and town councils in 2011.

It would be much appreciated if you would please spare 15 to 20 minutes to complete the attached questionnaire and return it to me, preferably by email to councilsurvey@hotmail.co.uk or by post to Town Clerk, Didcot Town Council, Britwell Road, Didcot OX11 7HN, marked private and confidential. I will happily provide a stamped addressed envelope. MY telephone number is 01235 812637.

All information will be treated confidentially and respondents will not be identified in the report, I do hope this assurance will encourage you to be honest when answering the questions. **Please return your response by the Friday 18th February 2011.**

Thank you for your help and for sparing the time to complete the questionnaire.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Stapleton
Town Clerk
25th January 2011

PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS IN ENGLAND
A STUDY INTO THE ROLE AND EXTENT
OF POLITICAL PARTIES

If there is not enough space in the box provided please continue on a separate sheet if required

SECTION 1: PERSONAL/COUNCIL DETAILS

1. What is your name? And the name of the Council you represent?

2. Do you consider the Council you represent to be political? ie: run along political party lines? If yes, please explain why?

3. Do you hold any specific position within the Council? And/or within an organisation involved in the Parish & Town Council sector? Please provide details.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS – PLEASE GIVE AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE TO SUPPORT YOUR VIEWS

4. Do you think that political parties play a negative or positive role within Parish and Town Councils and overall are they better or worse for the community?

5. Do you think that political parties help or hinder the internal processes and workings of Parish and Town Councils?

6. What are your views on the question, “Do members with political affiliation represent the party or the community?”

7. There is a view that political parties increase debate and involvement, particularly at the ballot box – what do you think?

8. Do you have any other comments to make on the role of political parties in Parish and Town Councils?

9. If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings, please supply a contact name and email address

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Comparative Study

A Summary of the Results of the Second Questionnaire

Each category included 2 councils with the characteristics listed below as Region, Rural/Urban/Mix of both, and Population:

a – Political councils with politically affiliated members:

- (i) South East, Mix, 11,000
- (ii) Yorkshire & Humberside, Urban, 17,000

b – Non-political councils with politically affiliated members:

- (i) South East, Rural, 15,000
- (ii) South East, Mix, 11,750

C – Non-political councils with no politically affiliated members:

- (i) East of England, Rural, 5,000
- (ii) South West, Rural, 800

Question Number Relating to Political Parties and:	a - Political Councils with Politically Affiliated Members	b - Non-Political Councils with Politically Affiliated Members	c - Non-Political Councils with no Politically Affiliated Members
4. A negative or positive role and better or worse for the community	Negative – too much political point scoring Positive – community know what to expect from them through policies/election leaflets A microcosm of Central Government -tend to focus on national policy and can conflict with local needs	Can be divisive – less important to have political direction and more important to have consensus Negative – they reduce and not increase local democracy	Negative - they would make decisions based on politics and not what is best for the community Negative – if the political group do not wish to progress an issue that the community want

<p>5. Help or hinder internal processes and workings of the council</p>	<p>They promote public awareness of the council</p> <p>If the party has an overall majority can help and assist the administrative process</p>	<p>Hinder – T&PCs need to nurture community spirit and involvement which transcends party politics</p> <p>Hinder – opposing councillors experiences are rarely utilised</p>	<p>Help – they would draw out more discussion</p> <p>Hinder – political point scoring</p> <p>Help – could be more effective as a group working with principal authorities</p>
<p>6. Do members with political affiliation represent the party or the community</p>	<p>Do what is best for the community but party affiliations can get in the way</p>	<p>Depends solely on the individual</p> <p>They can do both, however party politics can distract them</p>	<p>They may be torn between political affiliation and the community</p> <p>They may be “whipped” to tow the party line</p>
<p>7. Increase debate and involvement particularly at the ballot box</p>	<p>Certainly do, especially in the run up to an election</p> <p>True, but also means anyone wishing to stand has to join a political party to stand any chance of being elected</p>	<p>They do but can soon get sidelined in the fog of political war</p> <p>You would have fewer candidates to stand without party politics and they do encourage more involvement at the ballot box</p>	<p>Yes, I agree – and it is good to stimulate and encourage debate and air issues</p> <p>Depends on what is happening on the national scene</p> <p>Debate is increased as political parties receive more media coverage</p>
<p>8. Any other comments on the role of Political Parties in P&TCs</p>	<p>They have a role but should be more accountable to the community than to the party</p> <p>Councillors should not be dictated to by the party central office</p> <p>The link to national politics and parties could be damaging and detrimental</p>	<p>The public gets what the public deserves – democracy means that eventually each community will settle for what works</p> <p>They can be wonderfully effective in engaging a community at election time however they can also be an impediment to the council and get tied up in political point scoring</p>	<p>Political parties with an overall majority would leave the remaining members (and the people they represent) without a real voice and unable to implement anything</p> <p>Councillors should represent the community and not a political party – they can’t do both</p>

Response Distribution to the First Questionnaire to P&TCs

Bedfordshire 1	Staffordshire 23	
Berkshire 6	Surrey 2	
Buckinghamshire 10	Sussex 2	
Cambridgeshire 12	Warwickshire 14	
Cornwall 8	West Midlands 2	
Cumbria 26	West Sussex 10	
Derbyshire 12	West Yorkshire 12	
Devon 14	Wiltshire 15	
Dorset 12	Worcestershire 2	
Durham 16	Total:	420
East Sussex 7	Total P&TCs:	9,920
Essex 6	Percentage of P&TCs:	4.2%
Gloucestershire 23		
Hampshire 47		
Herefordshire 4		
Hertfordshire 6		
Kent 4		
Leicestershire 1		
Merseyside 2		
Norfolk 47		
North Yorkshire 10		
Northamptonshire 14		
Oxfordshire 28		
Shropshire 6		
Somerset 16		

Key Themes and Comments from the Responses to the First Questionnaire to P&TC

The respondent number (shown as a number) is the author's reference for the response, politically affiliated councillors (referred to as PA) indicates that the response is from a council that has councillors who declare affiliation to a political party, and political council (referred to as P) indicates that the council is deemed to be political by the respondent, i.e., run along political lines according to political party affiliation majority. It should also be noted that for identification purposes some of the words in the comments have been changed but do not impact on, or affect, the overall meaning, opinion or view.

1. Principal Authorities

“at times it appears to be an extension of the District and County, with their Councillors bringing their politics to the Council” (10, PA – Yes, P - No)

“we are not political but suffer from the fall out of politics from the District Council” (289, PA – Yes, P – No)

“I look after 2 parishes; both have political affiliation but are not political. One is treated differently by the District as it has different party councillors than the district” (306, PA – Yes P – No)

“our PC believes strongly that the PC should not be influenced by political party considerations. Our policy is to discount opinions advanced by non-members (eg: District and County Councillors) if they appear to be driven by a party line” (28 PA – No, P – No)

“over 80% of our councillors are twin-hatted with the unitary which does mean a lot of County business creeping into our deliberations” “we have a new group who are challenging the X party opposition on the principal authority” (65, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“over 60% are dual hatted as district councillors, one is triple hatted – which does help but can also bring district council business into the PC business” (317, PA – Yes, P – No)

“Political – No, although we do from time to time get caught in party political crossfire associated with the Unitary Council” (374, PA – Yes, P – No)

“PCs “brought in” services are affected by the leaderships of district and county councils” (78, PA – No, P – No)

“politics is not necessarily bad, only disadvantageous when principal authority fights spill into town” (101, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“difficulties can arise in cases such as ours where all our District and County Councillors, who all have political affiliations are also parish councillors, with the result that debates on a party political basis at another level tends to spill over into the parish arena” (413, PA – Yes, P – No)

“councillors do not have a good word to say about any action in our area by members of the Principal Authority who are members of another political group” (119, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“the dual/triple-hatted councillor is a phenomenon deserving of greater scrutiny” (132, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“National and principal council politics intrude, 2/3rd are also District Councillors and 1/5th are County Councillors” (395, PA – Yes, P – No)

“The PC is not political, but the Chair and Vice-Chair are X party ward members for the principal authority making it sometimes difficult to maintain a neutral front” (224, PA – Yes, P – No)

“Councillors have recognised political affiliations under which they were elected to other Councils, ie: Borough and County Councils, but as a Town Councillor they all declare as independents” (231 (PA – No, P – No)

“PCs need to be aware of and avoid the influence of District & County Councillors, which may be politically motivated” (260, PA – No, P – No)

2. Elections

Is the Council political? “yes at elections, other times no. I hate political parties but it does work to provide enough candidates to stand at election time. Elected because X party not because they would be good councillors” (42, PA – Yes, P – No)

“they (political parties) pay for leaflets at election time and it gives the electorate of those councils some clue about their candidates views” (58, PA – No, P – No)

Is the Council political? “only in the run up to the election” (138, PA – Yes, P – No)

“many political town and parish councillors frequently used the political party to pay for the nomination and campaigning and they are then given a platform to work from. Although this is useful if enabling more people to get involved in local councils it also lends a certain obligation to follow the will of the group” (142, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“for the most part political parties are not too bad, but in the run-up to local (district/county) and national elections, when the canvassing goes under political banners, everybody is point scoring and fighting to promote their party in whatever way they can, and the parish council gets drawn in” (163, PA – Yes, P – No)

Political? “no – not usually, though politics comes to the fore at election times” (169, PA – Yes, P – No)

“I know that some councillors offer themselves as a party member at the parish council level to get elected, but vote for another party in national elections” (362, PA – Yes, P – No)

Is the Council political? “during election time” “every election is contested on political grounds” (206, PA – Yes, P – No)

“residents tend to identify with a particular party, and standing for a major party makes it easier for residents to decide and encourages voting” (122, PA – Yes, P – No)

3. Officers of the Council

“It (Political parties) often has repercussions for officers who will have to take into account the political aspect of the council and that is never a good thing” (46, PA – Yes, P – No)

“Easier for me as an officer with a political council” (69, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“(Political Parties) Gives clear policy and political leadership and is welcomed by the Town Clerk for that” (115, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

4. Political Parties – Negative

“reduces the chance for those with a genuine interest in helping the community to get involved” (5, PA - Yes, P – No)

Recurring “should be kept out of all local government”, “the two should not mix”, “have no place at this level”, “P&TCs should be apolitical”, “politics should not be brought into PC business”, “the members represent the

electorate and not a political party”, “my parish councillors are interested in the good of the community they serve rather than being politically affiliated”, “should be serving the community, not their political ambitions” , “loyalty should be to the community not the party”, “political parties do not benefit the community”, “putting the needs of the community before the party”, “should all be non-political and representing the people”.

“for the good of the town regardless of political affiliation” (349, PA – Yes, P – No)

Political? “It can be when X party grouping together when they need to pass a decision” (402, PA – Yes, P – No)

“we are a non-political council, however they do sit in their little groups and I am sure that pre-determination takes place. I am not sure you will ever separate politics and councils” (30, PA – Yes, P – No)

“politics have not featured, but at a guess I would say 5 X party and 1 X party” (333, PA – Yes, P – No)

“political parties may be okay for Town Councils but not Parish Councils” (307, PA – No, P – No)

“many Parish Councils and small Town Councils will pride themselves in being non-political” (38, PA – No, P – No)

“not party political but a shared set of values” (44, PA – No, P – No)

“detrimental to it being run in an effective manner and takes over too many hours and meetings being dominated by (political) party power struggles” (346, PA – Yes, P – No)

“the councillors consider themselves as Village Managers not politicians” (298, PA – No, P – No)

“having been a clerk for 50 years and served 6 PCs, there was only one who brought politics into the equation and that was the worst council I have worked for” (49, PA – No, P – No)

“x parish councillors believe that politics should not be a factor in Parish Council affairs” (57, PA – No, P – No)

“my parish councillors don’t have any publicly recognised political affiliation. But it would be naive to suppose that their private political beliefs don’t bear on some of the decisions that they make” (158, PA – No, P – No)

“a PC dominated by one political group cannot claim to truly represent the whole community” (363, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“being political can dilute the democratic representation for the community. There is very little discussion at Council meetings, as matters have already been decided in group” (69, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“there is little dissention at Council meetings as any vote is always lost by the X party (the opposition party)” (377, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“our “best” Councillor is denied access to Chairmanship of Committees and the Mayoral role because she is not from the majority party” (85, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“all that they (The Council) achieve is enhanced by not being political” (290, PA – No, P – No)

“politics at this level can hinder decision making to the detriment of the community if Councillors feel they have to tow the party line” (398, PA – Yes, P – No)

“the problem is when you have someone who wants to climb the political ladder at any cost, it can damage the community” (98, PA – Yes, P – No)

“probably inappropriate at this level – but not sure about impact of Localism Bill” (106, PA – Yes, P – No)

“one of the X party will argue black is white if the X party councillor says black is black” (320, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“it is so obvious by action or in debate when the only purpose is to score a political point. There is no purpose or benefit to the community” (125, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“decisions are frequently made in group meetings in private....this reduces debate among councillors and cuts out the valuable contributions other members from outside the political party can make” (142, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“if people are very political then they stick together and vote the same, not always in the best interests of the people they represent” (394, PA – Yes, P – No)

“politics drives wedges between people who should all be working together for the good of everyone” (161, PA – No, P – No)

“definitely that local people’s opinions were not also taken into account if they were against the party line” (165, PA – No, P – No)

“not being political makes it easier for the council to act for the good of the whole community” (175, PA – No, P – No)

5. Political Parties – Positive

“with political councils it is much easier to deal with the business of the council” “working for an independent council is very difficult as the politics that are behind the decisions cannot be dealt with openly” (64, PA – Yes, P – No)

“it really does have its advantages being political, especially in the decision making” (69, PA – Yes, P – No)

“can be useful to influence principal authorities if of same political persuasion” (371, PA – Yes, P – No)

“they (Political Parties) offer clear leadership and direction” (275, PA – Yes, P – No)

“it makes decision making much clearer as decisions made by the X group are the ones we implement” (177, PA – Yes, P – No)

“I seem to have less trouble with my Councillors than other parishes....whether it’s because they are kept in line by their leaders” (85, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“politics are far more easily understandable at party-politics level than community-politics level” (97, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“we have been able to hold audiences at national level more on the back that we are a very large X party controlled Town Council than anything else” (397, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“there is a role within the parish & town sector for political parties” (114, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“it always ensures there is a democratic mandate. Gives clear policy and political leadership and is welcomed by the Town Clerk for that” (315, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“the political dimension gives a discipline that can overcome problems....there is a line over which political parties will not cross for fear of

adverse publicity and handing the political advantage to their opponents. The internal party discipline can also assist” (117, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“dealing with a majority party is relatively easy, whether they are party political or “independents”” (147, PA – Yes, P – No)

“actually it is easier to work with a leader who has overall control, whichever party that is” (210, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“I keep stressing that no need to be political to be a councillor, but the X party seems to recruit and provide them all – without them the PC may not have any” (212, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“having political affiliation has been really useful in gaining access to and help from political parties with the time and expertise to help draft telling responses to issues such as electoral division” (213, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

6. Political Parties – General Comments

“with the demise of the district councils and formation of a unitary, i can see the larger towns in X county becoming more party political at the time of the next elections in 2013” (74, PA – Yes, P – No)

“there should not be party politics at any level of local government, however until we have a system of government that facilitates that across the country then my preference is for political leadership” (75, PA – Yes, P – No)

“the majority party have the political mandate given to them by the electorate” (79, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“even if members stand on a party ticket, working together for the local community is of greater importance to them” (107, PA – Yes, P – No)

“the 2 political groups actually want very much the same for the town but would do it in different ways” (116, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“all (Councillors) supported by the X party at election time but not sure if all are dedicated politicians” (128, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“whilst having members of political parties (the council) does not act along political lines. People (Councillors) act by themselves and there are often arguments on topics with the decision splitting the political parties” (131, PA – Yes, P – No)

“generally speaking Councillors want to do whats best for their community irrespective of their political persuasion” (138, PA – Yes, P – No)

“politics play a very minor role in this parish” (297, PA – No, P – No)

“they call a (political) group meeting two days before full council and all questions, decisions are made and the (party) whip is used. If a group member does not attend the meeting, they are not allowed to speak at the full council meeting” (343, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“town and parish councils are locally accountable for the money they spend and how they arrive at decisions on behalf of the community. Party politics based on national political ideology simply doesn’t fit” (149, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“This Council deplores the extent to which it (party politics) has invaded larger councils” (393, PA – No, P – No)

“The parish council I work for makes a point of being non-political” (198, PA – Yes, P – No)

“I (the clerk) do not encourage political influences within the PC. I cannot see how politics can affect whether you purchase a new bench or not” (227, PA – Yes, P – No)

“do we really need a political debate over whether to extend xmas lights, refurbish a community garden or buy new planters?” (231, PA – No, P – No)

On the additional survey “as party politics play no part in our council I see no point in completing additional surveys” (235, PA – Yes, P – No)

“Our councillors are firmly anti-political allegiances and it is written into our standing orders that there will be no party political factions” (255, PA – No, P – No)

7. Political – General Comments

“only when it come to the budget setting” (62, PA – Yes, P – No)

“not overtly but has been in the past when the X party was strong in the town, although this has dwindled with the national move” (274, PA – Yes, P – No)

“not overtly but the presence of the previous leader of X (principal) authority as our Chair means that everyone assumes we are political” (83, PA – Yes, P – No)

Recurring – “not overtly political”

“No, but it is evident that some of the X party are told how and when to vote and there is a party line” (122, PA – Yes, P – No)

“it is different for the smaller parishes where the candidates are known to the majority of residents, but as the town or village gets bigger that personal affiliation tends to be lost and seems to be replaced by residents political affiliations” (322, PA – Yes, P – No)

8. National Politics

“As is often the case in politics generally the local issues are of secondary consideration to residents’ primary opinions of how the national parties are doing” (122, PA – Yes, P – No)

“The full council meetings now see debates mainly on policy and spending that are direct lifts of national political policy” (126, PA – Yes, P – Yes)

“National and principal council politics intrude, 2/3rd (of the Councillors) are also District Councillors and 1/5th are County Councillors” (395, PA – Yes, P – No)

9. Councillor Comments

“I would like to see political parties removed from all councils. Too many decisions are taken on political grounds instead of the needs of the population” (Councillor with 35 years experience in LG) (N/A, PA – No, P – No)

“In a small community political affiliation is not particularly relevant” (N/A, PA – No, P – No)

“not being political makes it easier for the council to act for the good of the whole community” (175, PA – No, P – No)

“I strongly believe that P&TCs should act in the local, not political, interest” (253, PA – No, P – No)

10. Training

“I am aware of some T&PCs where the political parties use these councils to blood and train candidates for higher office e.g. principal authorities and MPs” (170, PA – Yes, P – No)

Comparison of Key Findings
The Secondary Research (Literature Review) and
The Primary Research

Secondary Research (Literature Review – Chapter 2)	Primary Research (Results and Analysis – Chapter 4)
A perception that Political Parties are spreading within P&TCS	Results show they have spread significantly when compared to the 1991 survey
There are P&TCs were members are affiliated to political parties but do not consider the council to be political	Confirmed, and also shows a significant increase in the number compared to 1991 survey
Political Party membership is in decline	Not covered in the results but they did show a significant increase in political parties in P&TCs
Political party voters may cast a judgement on central government instead of local issues	Views indicated that this could well happen and offered a link with national politics
It is questionable whose views the politically affiliated member will represent; the party or the community	Opinions were expressed that this may well be the case
The community know what they will get with politically affiliated members but the members may be subject to many outside pressures	This view was expressed in the results and also the acknowledgment that they may well be subject to outside pressures, e.g.: the political group

Political parties encourage debate and active involvement in local issues and the ballot box but not in areas with political stronghold	Evidence suggested that they do indeed encourage debate and active involvement
P&TCs are used by the major parties as a source of political education for aspiring politicians	This was confirmed and an example of a parish councillor now being a serving MP given
Political parties offer an established structure with support for members that could have recognisable benefits	The results showed that the political party does give an established structure and also a certain amount of discipline for members but could also stifle debate

Summary of the Key New Issues and Findings from the

Primary Research

Not Covered in the Literature Review – Chapter 2

- Political parties are becoming more of a feature in P&TCs;
- 9% of P&TCs have an appointed leader;
- The political make-up of P&TCs is similar to the general election result of 2010;
- Minor political parties are active in P&TCs;
- Principal authorities party politics impacts on P&TCs;
- Political parties offer openness in decision making and clear policy direction and leadership;
- Political parties offer resources in terms of time and expertise when responding to issues;
- Political parties can have a negative impact on the workings of P&TCs;
- Political parties can prevent the involvement of members who may have something to offer the council;
- The overwhelming majority of respondents had negative comments and views about political parties in P&TCs;
- Clerks at political councils tend to favour the role of political parties as opposed to clerks in non-political councils;
- Political parties can stifle debate at P&TCs and there may be predetermination.

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