Scrutiny as engagement

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Councillors' role is changing

- Local Govt Act 200
- Local Govt and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Communities in Control White Paper
- Local Democracy Economic Prosperity and Construction Bill
- 'Control Shift' Conservative Green Paper

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Global Drivers

- Environmental change
- Demographic change
- Interdependence (cultural, economic, environmental)
- Information overload
- Diversity and solidarity
- Economic instability
- SResource pressures

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key themes

- "Executive-isation" of councils
- Move towards participation as key feature of local democracy
- Frontline councillors squeezed from both directions?

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Scrutiny key tool for defining role of councillors

- Obvious how it holds council to account
- But how does it engage communities?

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Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- S 119 enables any Member to refer to OSC a "local government matter" which falls within the committee's remit.
- Limited to issues affecting a single council ward
- S 236 gives councils right to delegate council functions to individual members to exercise in their ward

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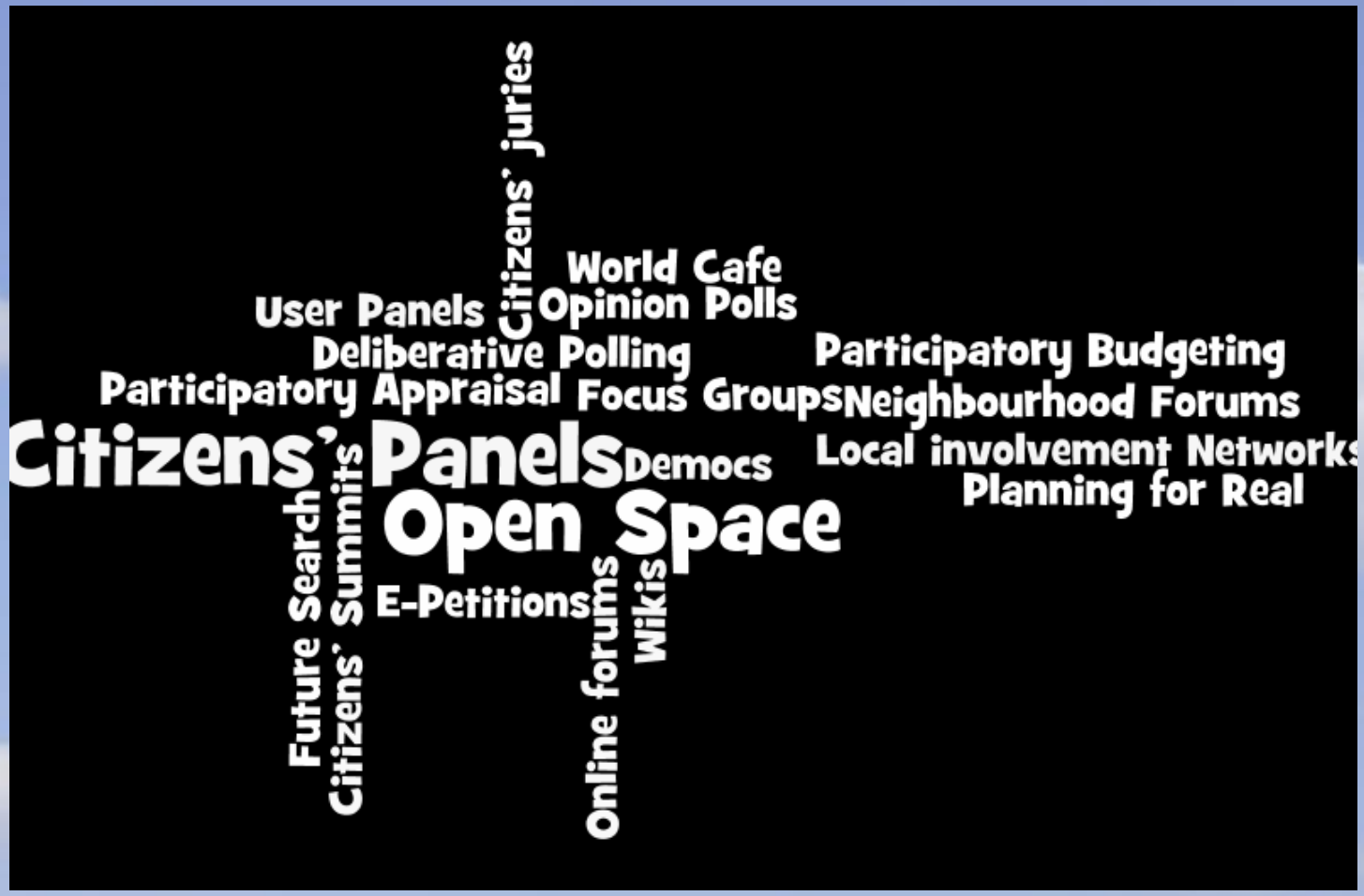
But limited (useless?) without grounding in participative techniques



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Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

- Area assessment focusing on three questions:
  - how well do local priorities express community needs and aspiration?
  - how well are outcomes and improvements being delivered?
  - what are the prospects for improvement?

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CAA & Scrutiny: Audit Commission view

- Two-way relationship between scrutiny and CAA.
- Scrutiny reviews carried out locally will provide valuable evidence that can feed in to CAA.
- Findings from CAA should help overview and scrutiny committees in identifying where they may wish to focus their attention

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So the argument is…

- CAA is essentially about meeting community aspirations
- CAA supports and is supported by scrutiny
- Scrutiny must therefore be informed by and reflective of community engagement
- A tool to measure community engagement and a tool to action community concerns

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Challenges: 1 evidence

- Impartiality very rare – normally making a point
- Confirmation bias
- Availability bias
- Type 1 statistical error
- Evidence not a substitute for judgement
- Cognitive biases hard wired

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Challenges: 2 a long way to go

- “There is little evidence that councils are using overview and scrutiny arrangements to hold LSPs, and partners, to account”

- Audit Commission, 'Working better together? Managing local strategic partnerships' , 2009

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Challenges 3: skills

- Understanding processes
- Critical challenge
- Collaboration
- Assessment of evidence

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Challenges 4: re-thinking roles

- Role of councillor changing
- Scrutiny role and community leadership role merging
- Providing continuity
- Retaining focus on the big strategic questions
- Facilitating the engagement of citizens
- Holding the ring between competing interests
- Speaking for those voices that do not shout loudly
- Mediating between local decision making and the complex realties of implementation and delivery

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