

### **Alison Chisholm address to Oxfordshire County Council 12/12/2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about participatory processes and deliberative democracy. I am a resident of Rose Hill and a researcher at Oxford University. I led the Street Voice citizens' jury on transport, climate and health in Headington last year, and we went on to organise a workshop about deliberative democracy for councillors and officers at Kellogg College in May, which some of you attended.

For those who weren't there, citizens' juries and assemblies bring together a diverse group of people reflective of the community to hear information from a range of perspectives, often on complex or contentious issues. This is followed by facilitated deliberation, to find common ground on ways forward.

These are respectful, constructive processes that deliver policy recommendations that are responsive to local needs. Time and again they have been shown to bring out the best in people, to engage and empower citizens, and enable them to work through differences, building trust where it has been damaged.

They *are* resource intensive but some councils have approached foundations for funding or collaborate with others to commission them jointly. We know there's a high price to pay for bringing in policies when communities feel they are not heard and become polarised. And the cost is not just for the event itself – it's an investment in trust and building bridges between citizens and decision-makers, which can seed further engagement processes, helping to build up resilient, cohesive communities.

There are precious few spaces where people who disagree with each other come together to really listen and understand other perspectives. Citizens' juries and assemblies are examples of where this can really happen. If you pay attention to how they interface with the existing democratic system, they are not a threat to it, but, the opposite – they can rejuvenate it, even resuscitate it. So I strongly encourage you to support them.