

Buckinghamshire County Council

Buckinghamshire County Council and devolution

Gill Harding, Rebecca Carley
Local Democracy APPG March 15th



Why?

- Better quality and vfm
 - Some services are simply better / cheaper at smaller scale
 - BCC vfm study, Locality “Diseconomies of Scale
 - creative solutions - better ROI
- Local choice and control over service design and priorities
 - links to wellbeing /self-reliance and cohesion
 - greater link between local tax and benefits
 - boosting democratic engagement
- Parishes
 - precepts not capped
 - “democratic mandate” – best placed to moderate/ration
 - BCC – firm belief in value and purpose of 1st level of local govt

Buckinghamshire County Council

Background

- parishes only interested in highways/public realm activity
- 1st formal devo agreement in 2006
- New Deal - parish devolution policy 2008
- slow take up - 23 formal agreements by 2014; and informal agreements
- inconsistent funding (some v generous)
- great social enterprise scheme [Stewkley Community Enterprise](#)



And then everything changed

BCC Strategic Plan



- Strategic aim: Creating opportunities & building self-reliance, including:
“devolve Council assets and services to town and parish councils where it makes sense to do so”

Buckinghamshire County Council

2010/11 ££ pressures \implies community/parish transfer activity

- Frantic activity – but 2 -3 years to complete transfers below
- 16 youth clubs
 - one off transitional grants
 - 3 youth centres remain directly managed by BCC
- 19 community libraries
 - range from almost independent of the council to partnership model
 - small annual revenue grant
 - 10 remain BCC managed
- 2 Adult Day Centres
- Transfer of green spaces, one disused school and one windmill



Buckinghamshire County Council

Parish Council devolution

- 168 local councils in Bucks
 - incl 27 parish mtgs of which 5 raise a precept
- 2014 devo Highways proposal
 - part of demand management prog – reduce complaints, build better/sustainable service at less/no cost to BCC
 - Grass cutting, RoW, sign cleaning etc. in 30 mph areas
 - Proportion of approved BCC budget for those services
 - Funding guaranteed for 4 years (3 years for tranche 2)
 - Tranche 1 April 2015 / tranche 2: 44 & 40 parishes (estimate)
- Feedback so far
 - Significant drop in complaints/enquiries to BCC
 - Customer satisfaction – reported increase in quality/quantity
 - Creative solutions emerging
 - Some parishes are already expecting to 100% fund - general acceptance that BCC ££s will dry up

Parish Council devolution

- Further transport/environment devo planned e.g.
 - Potholes
 - Parking enforcement
 - School crossing patrols
 - Waste disposal licensing
 - Extension of general activity to 50 mph areas

- Community provision / collaboration (not formal devolution) e.g.
 - Community wardens scheme
 - Prevention-end of social care
 - Foster Finder reward scheme

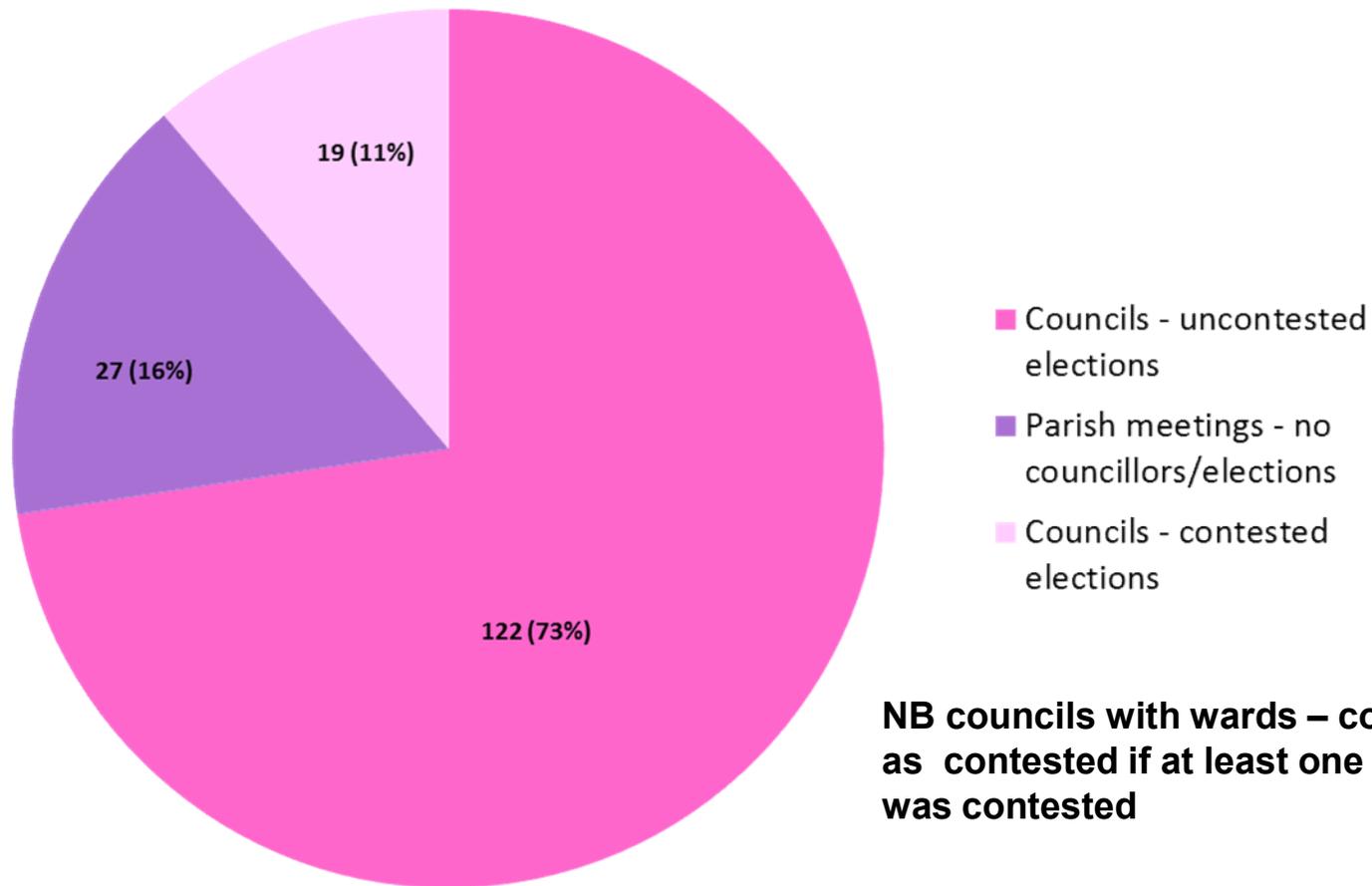
- BCC sponsored capacity building programme “Parish Futures”

Key issues /lessons learned

- Variable appetite, capability and capacity of different parishes
- Size
 - Not key determinant
 - but many councils too small to be effective for service provision
- Little interest in collaboration
 - “clusters” only worked where one parish took the lead and acts as contractor to the others
 - Stewkley Community Enterprise

- Issues of double taxation / cost shunting
- Anxiety about precept capping
- Low democratic participation in parish elections
 - Contested elections - slightly higher devo take-up
 - Size (precept and population) - not that influential
 - Cost of elections for small parish councils

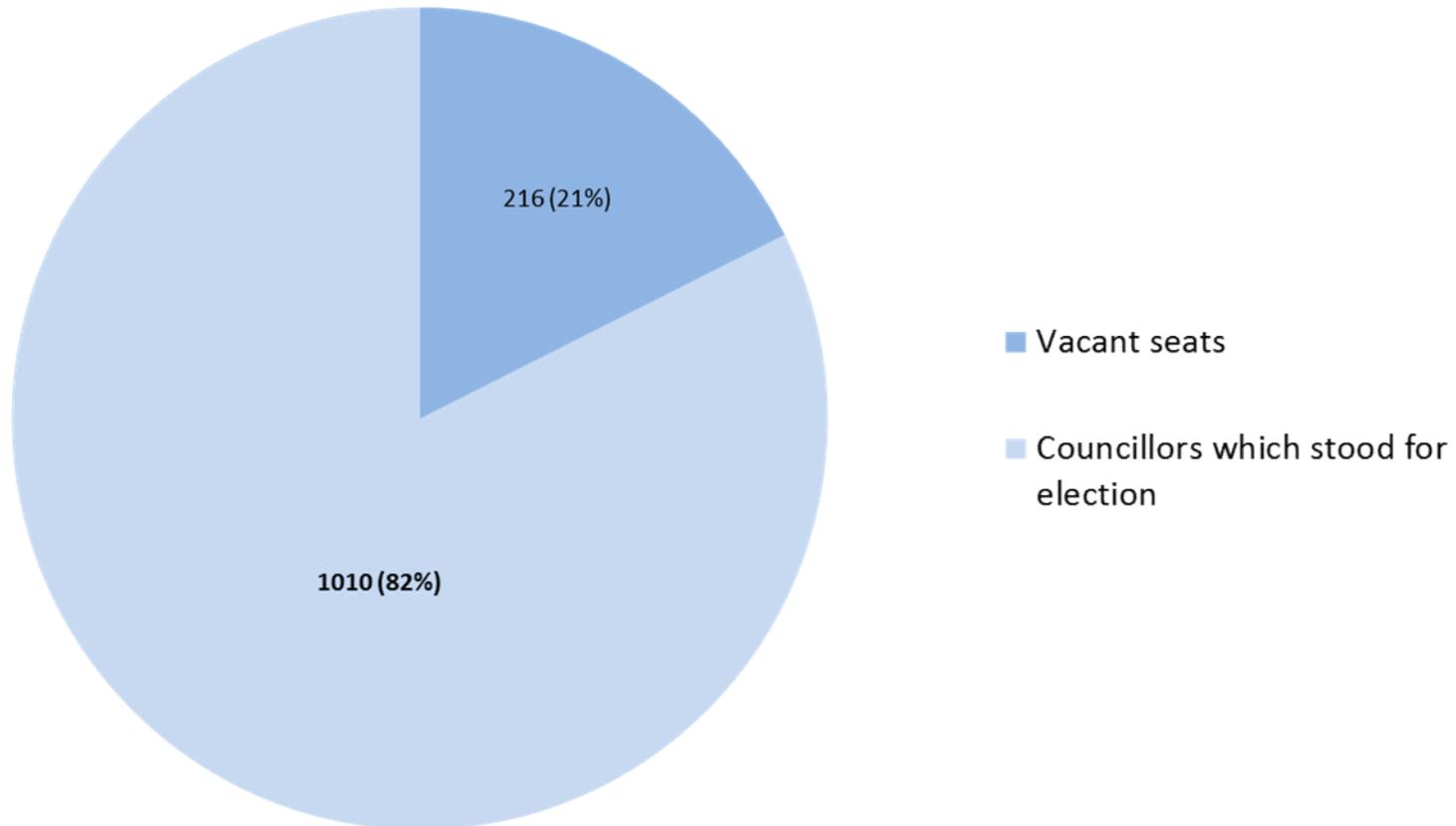
2015 local council elections – 168 local councils



NB councils with wards – counted as contested if at least one ward was contested

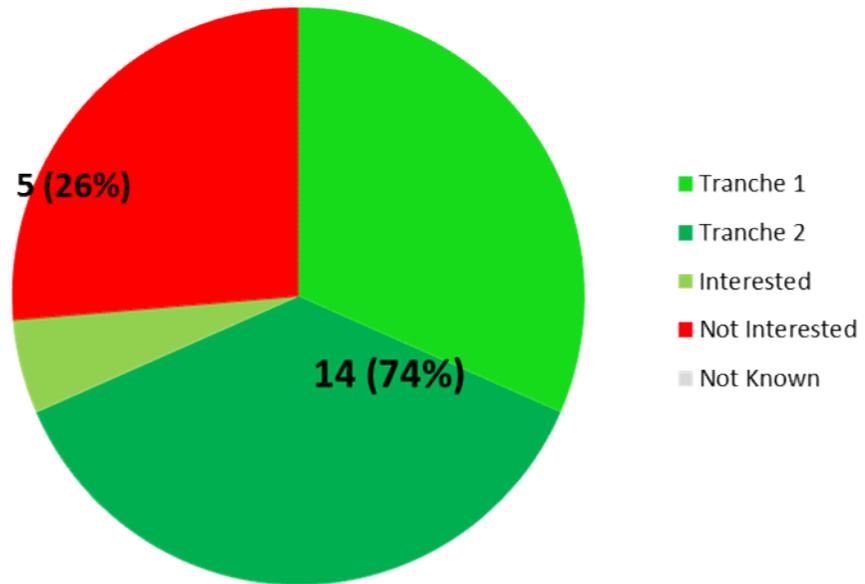


2015 local council elections - 1226 councillors

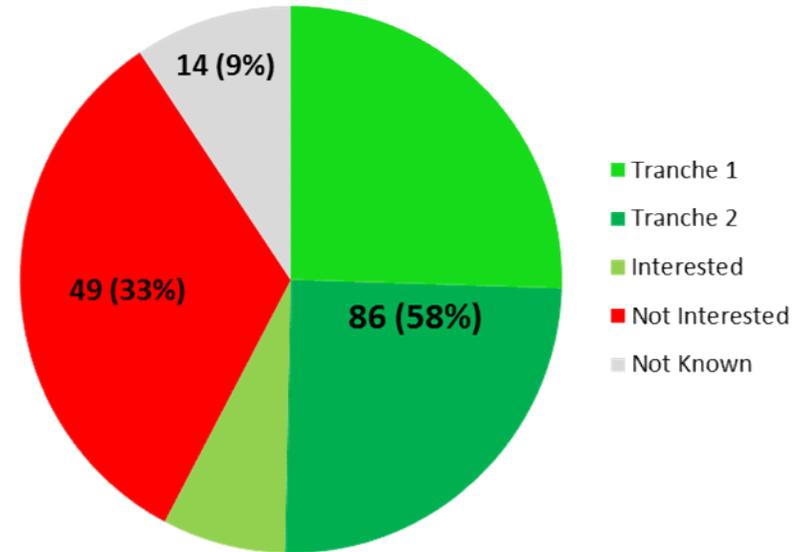


Buckinghamshire County Council

Local councils with contested elections

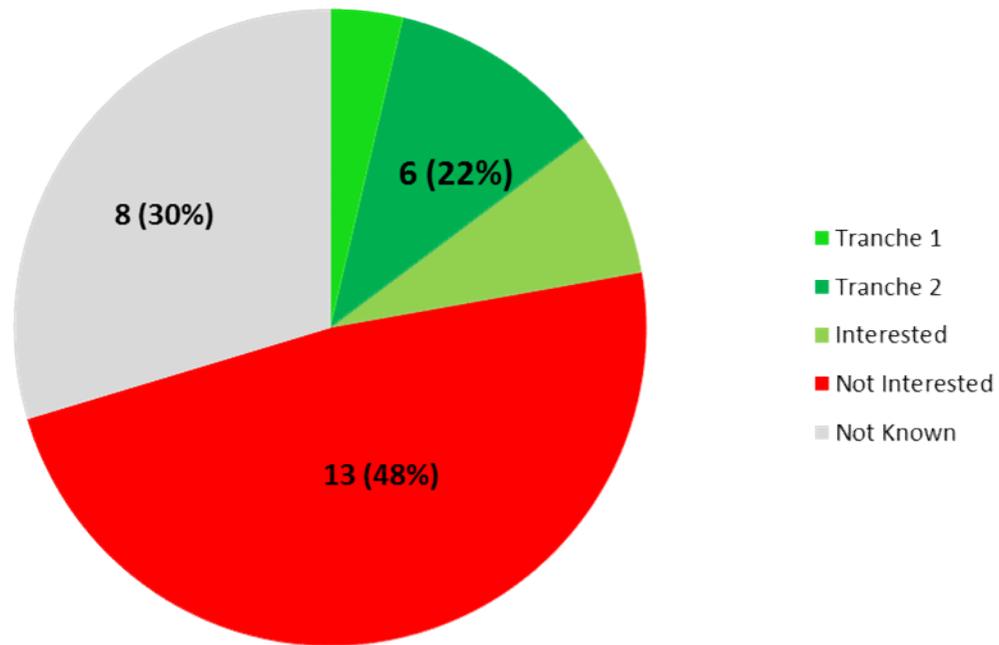


Local councils with uncontested elections



Buckinghamshire County Council

Parish Meetings



Definition of parish devolution

- a) An agreement for a local council to exercise similar discretion to that which the principle authority has in discharging a statutory function; and where the principle authority's permission is required (typically use LGA 1972 S101)

and / or

- b) Significant transfer of resource for an agreed purpose
- c) But, commonly, is also used to describe a bigger role for local councils; and potentially structural change