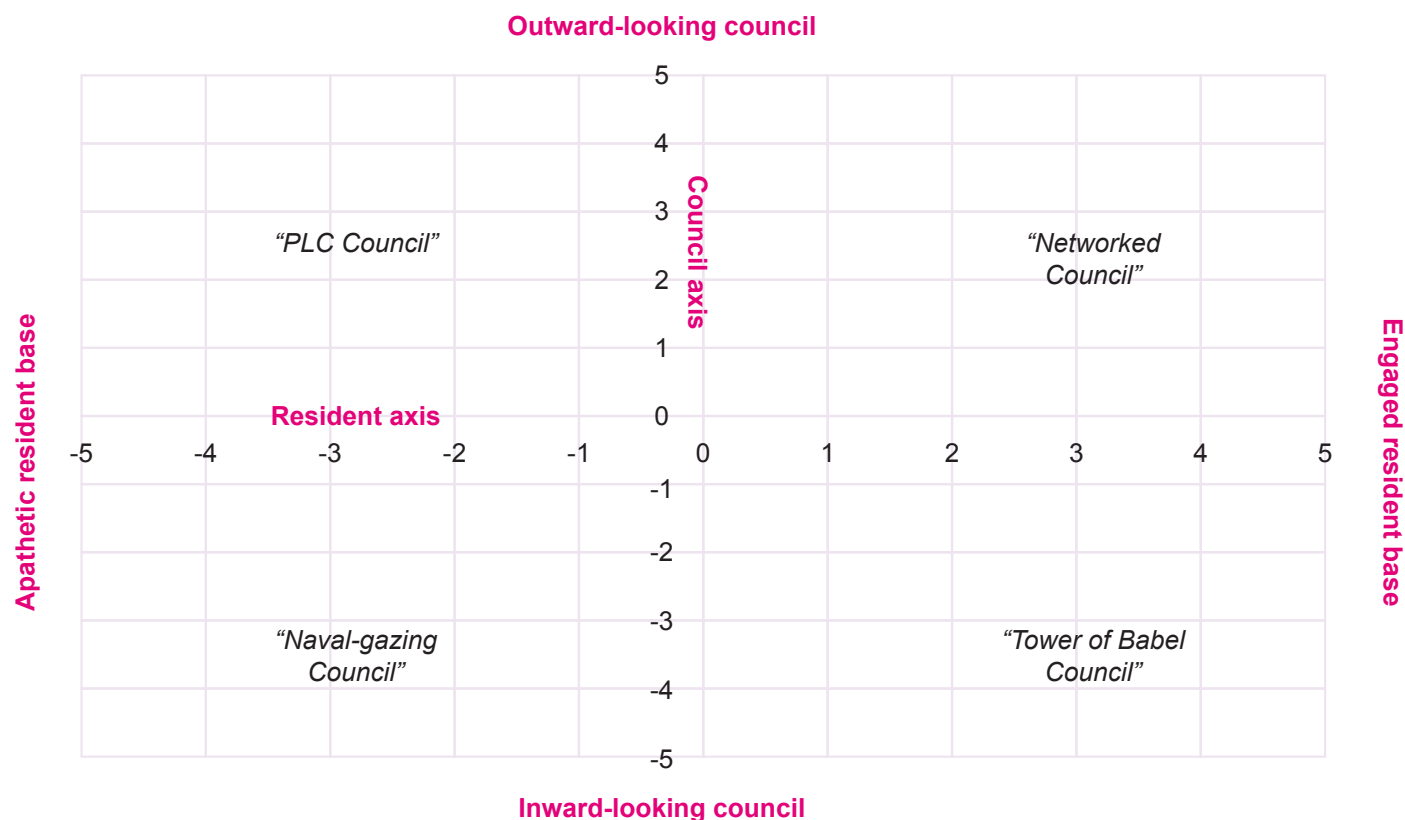


### Test: What type of council are you?

The grid below was designed to give you a rough idea of your engagement starting point. It was developed by local councillors for the New Local Government Network.<sup>1</sup> To use it you have to decide both how outward-looking or inward-looking your council is, and how engaged or apathetic your residents are. You then plot these estimates on the grid to see which of the four simplified types of council yours is closest to. Finally, you can interpret your council's position by reading the description of its type beneath the grid.



<sup>1</sup> 'Future Councillors: Where next for local Politics?' 'Democratic Futures', Simon Parker and Liam Scott-Smith, NLGN, July 2013

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Read the following descriptions of an extremely outward-facing and an extremely inward-facing council. Where does yours lie on the spectrum of +5 to -5?

#### Outward facing (+5)

You're a highly outward-facing authority, with many initiatives driven by exposure to new ideas. You're considered to be at the forefront of local government thinking and look beyond the immediate sector for ideas. There are often specialists visiting and your staff are regularly at conferences and on boards leading the discourse. The cabinet and the leadership are seen as innovators, and the overall style is entrepreneurial.

#### Inward Facing (-5)

You find approaches to most issues from within a set of officers and cabinet members. It is common for there to be defensive responses to decisions, and people rarely 'stick their head above the parapet'. There's a general distrust of the public, and external bodies or new ways of thinking are seen as a threat. Solutions tend to be tried and tested.

Now read the descriptions of very engaged and totally apathetic residents, and place yours on the spectrum of +5 to -5.

#### Engaged (+5)

When decisions are made, or being talked about, local people are always in the room either physically or figuratively. This clear in your communications, which bring people into the conversation. Most initiatives involve local people, and resident groups are working on and delivering services with the council already. When you start an initiative, you are often surprised by how many people take an interest and contact you to get involved.

#### Apathetic (-5)

It is difficult to think of a service or initiative where local people are anything more than superficially involved. Services struggle when changes are required and a great deal of time is spent dealing with difficulties on the front line. Bringing residents into conversations is always an uphill struggle and you rarely scratch the surface. Most people don't know who the leaders in the council are, and it's difficult to get local groups to meaningfully take part.

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Finally, read the description appropriate to your 'type' of council below, and consider what this means for your approach to engagement and the challenges that you face.

PLC Council	Networked Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• business-like, pragmatic and technocratic</li> <li>• stable politics and a strategic view</li> <li>• high performer able to push through services redesign</li> <li>• executive members more like officers, perhaps with a business background</li> <li>• entrepreneurial flair and paternalistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• public able to do more for themselves</li> <li>• councillors focused on economic growth</li> <li>• devolution of many services to the neighbourhood level</li> <li>• challenge to traditional councillor role: councillors have an entrepreneurial and activist skill set</li> <li>• integration of services with others such as adult social care with GPs</li> </ul>
Navel Gazing Council	Tower of Babel Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• politically divided with regular hung or changing leadership</li> <li>• low public activism</li> <li>• likely to strip back services to bare minimum in the face of cuts</li> <li>• unruly political groups with frontline councillors involved in high-energy scheming and plotting</li> <li>• executive members struggle to get things done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• navel gazing internal characteristics</li> <li>• an active civil society ready to take on and challenge the internal scenario</li> <li>• public protests</li> <li>• electoral challenge from residents associations and independents</li> <li>• pressure for extreme localisation</li> <li>• councillors defensive</li> <li>• highly political with political skills coming to the fore (negotiation, rhetoric, communication and mediation)</li> </ul>

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