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Independent report critical of councils' behaviour when introducing LTNs

In 2024 the independent think-tank Demos published a report about low traffic neighbourhoods. It used the debate around LTNs to look at democratic deficits and disinformation.

Local authorities come in for persistent criticism.

"Councils would misrepresent [complex] evidence in online debates by sharing their own evidence of the policy with simple, but misleading summaries of results."

"The rush to introduce LTNs caught many residents off-guard with some finding out about LTNs through tickets or penalties. Many councils simply failed to target the full range of households that needed the information about the schemes that would affect them. For those that councils did target, communications failed to cut through. From the start, residents were left to feel excluded from the process of policy design and implementation."

"The dominance of web-based, passive approaches to consultation and lack of proactive engagement with vulnerable communities, such as disabled people, who were likely to be disproportionately affected

by schemes, led to the exclusion of citizens from decision-making that had a significant impact on their day-to-day lives. The timing and scope of consultations as well as the perception of council bias in the process led many citizens to feel disempowered and that their participation was futile."

"Councils would misrepresent [complex] evidence….by sharing their own evidence of the policy with simple, but misleading summaries of results."

"The Council is perceived as relying on poor evidence and mischaracterizing the level of positive impact schemes are having leading to accusations of being deliberately deceptive. The lack of transparency and facilitated discussion at a local level regarding the trade-offs implicit in the policy as well as the positive framing of more nuanced evidence led some citizens to describe the council's approach as 'manipulative' and even 'gaslighting'……overall, this study challenges the narrow conception that local rows over LTNs have been fuelled by wild conspiracy theories. Instead, it points to a failure of councils to properly understand and engage their communities; to national politicians stoking divisions for political gain; and to an absence of high quality local journalism."

Full report: https://demos.co.uk/research/driving-disinformation-democratic-deficits-disinformation-and-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-a-portrait-of-policy-failure/

With the exception of the Lib Dems in Oxford and Bath and the Greens in Bristol, the Covid and Post-Covid LTNs have largely been introduced by Labour councils.