



You will hear lots of words during the Citizens' Assembly relating to democracy and different parts of the democratic system. Some of these might be unfamiliar to you. Or you might have heard them, but be unsure exactly what they mean.

That's no problem! We hope that this list will give you some helpful pointers. If you're still unsure, remember that you're always welcome to ask.

If you hear words that you think should be added to this list, please let us know. You can mention it to your group facilitator, or drop a note to the Assembly email address (cademocracyuk@involve.org.uk).

– Democracy basically means rule by the citizens themselves. It can take many different forms, as we will explore during the Citizens' Assembly.

the Prime Minister and come from either the House of Commons or the House of Lords (see below).

- The Cabinet is the team of the most senior ministers in the government.

- The Civil Service is the group of administrators who help the government develop and implement its policies. Members of the Civil Service are called civil servants. They are neutral – they don't take sides in political debates.

- A legislature is a

– Decision-making on many matters is ‘devolved’ in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. That means that decisions about, say, the health service or schools in Scotland are made in Scotland.

Scotland has the Scottish Parliament and Scottish government. Wales has the Welsh Parliament, or Senedd, and the Welsh government. Northern Ireland has the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive.

In England, such matters are decided by the UK Parliament and government.

– Local government is made up of councils with responsibility for providing a range of services in local areas. It takes different forms in different parts of the country, and some places also have regional mayors. Local government is largely run by elected councillors.

– A political party is a group of people who share a common ideology or set of political goals. Political parties compete between each other to win votes and seats in elections, in order to advance their political aims.

– The judiciary is often called the ‘third branch’ of the state, along with the executive (government) and legislature (parliament). It is made up of courts, overseen by judges. It is responsible for determining whether the law has been followed or broken in particular cases, and what should happen if it has been broken. There are three separate legal systems in the United Kingdom: England and Wales; Scotland; and Northern Ireland.

– The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United Kingdom. It can hear appeals of specific cases from lower courts in any of the United Kingdom’s three legal systems.

– A watchdog is a person or organisation responsible for making sure that individuals and groups follow particular standards and do not break the law.

– Representative democracy is a form of democracy in which decisions are made by representatives who have been elected.

– At a general election, all of the seats in parliament are up for election. There are general elections in the UK for the UK Parliament (the House of Commons), the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. General elections for each body usually take place every five years – though general elections for the House of Commons sometimes happen sooner.

– Direct democracy is a form of democracy in which citizens – rather than representatives – decide issues, by directly voting on them.

– A coalition occurs when two or more parties decide to form a government together. This is usually because no party has enough seats in parliament to govern on its own.

– Scrutiny is the close examination and investigation of government policies, actions and spending.

– Lobbying is an attempt to convince politicians or officials to support a certain policy. Lobbying can be done by individual citizens, but it is also done by organised pressure groups.

– Accountability is the process through which people with responsibilities are required to explain and justify the decisions they have made, and, if necessary, face consequences. For example, parliaments hold government ministers to account. And voters can hold their elected representatives to account.

– Consensus is the idea that decisions can only be taken when all of the people involved agree with the decision or proposal in question.