

Also linked to this piece of work is the evaluation of the Community Empowerment Act currently underway, and the Scottish Community Development Centre with What Works Scotland is working on a review of Community Councils as part of wider work on citizen participation in Scotland.

There are two strands to the Local Governance review:

Strand 1 Community decision making

There is a growing recognition that it is often better for decisions about the issues that affect different communities in Scotland to be taken with more active involvement of those communities. The Scottish Government wants to make changes to the way decisions are made in communities. Conversations, badged as 'Democracy Matters' have been happening since June and this first part of the process finished up at the end of November 2018.

Strand 2 Public Service Governance

This concerns whether there are decisions currently taken nationally which would be better taken locally, and a recognition that outcomes for citizens and communities are best when decisions are taken at the right level of place. There are already some good examples of this, but the review team would like to hear how these approaches could be strengthened, whether there are new powers that are required for progress and how to hardwire better local governance arrangements into places.

A joint letter to public sector leaders was sent in June 2018 inviting them for ideas – this stage ran from June to December 2018.

You can read the full letter here: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/local-governance-review-letter-22-june-2018/>

These conversations have been happening within Community Planning Partnerships, with Local Authority Chief Executives and COSLA and with communities but we thought there were opportunities for the principles of the LG review to be explored by community safety partnerships.

The Masterclass was less well attended than expected, given the interest from the CSP leads at our regional sessions. On the day we had 11 participants. We had some really interesting conversations and positive feedback from participants; there is definitely more we can do to develop these conversations in 2019.

We circulated a Survey Monkey link to gather some feedback from participants and have also summarised some of the day's highlights.

This learning report pulls a summary of each of the sessions together with the formal and reflective feedback to give readers a sense of the day and the major learning points. We see this as one stop on the journey of thinking about citizen participation and will be using the Masterclass and the learning report as a springboard to develop further support and guidance for people working in partnerships; for example practical examples of applications, further learning sessions.

A summary of the sessions and some reflections are covered below. The timing of the Masterclass meant that a number of developments have happened since then e.g. Democracy Matters conversations finishing up and regional development ideas submitted; we've chosen to share some of these as part of this learning report.

Session 1: Introduction to the Local Governance Review,

Nick Bland Scottish Government

Nick shared the work so far on both strands of the review and spoke about strengthening local democracy, strengthening local *governance* (and how this is distinct from local government) and participation, subsidiarity and decentralisation. He also spoke about Scotland's current local democracy, power, capacity-building and resources. Potential for a 'Local democracy Bill' during 2019 was also highlighted.

Questions from participants were about where this type of work is working well, and where it wasn't (e.g. community councils vs community development trusts), comments on the importance of community learning and development roles in this piece of work, but concerns that these departments have been decimated within local government in recent years and concerns about the tension between Scottish Government's centralisation agenda vs increasing participation agenda.

Nick shared some ideas that had been put forward as part of the 'Democracy Matters' conversations relating to community safety and justice – predominantly people want to be more involved in decisions relating to Community policing, waste management / environmental services and employability services.

Session 2: Conversations

The remainder of the session was an open space which offered participants an opportunity to contribute new ideas to the review and explore how they could apply the approaches within their partnership or organisation. SCSN provided the following prompts:

What decisions do you take as a partnership / team - could you involve / devolve to citizens?

- Is communities in control a good idea to begin with?
- Think about what the positives, and potential challenges associated with this are. How you could you overcome them?
- What changes are needed to allow this to happen e.g. are there existing forms of local decision-making to allow this, or are there new forms that could work well?

How might you speak to your local communities or communities of interest about this?

- Are there existing groups / meetings that could be used to facilitate this? Or is there a new conversation that could work well?

As a group we also considered what decisions were made nationally or by national bodies within the safer communities and justice sectors, and whether any of them

could be made locally or regionally. The group found this more difficult to answer, but it is something the SCSN could pick up in 2019 and provide more direction on the decisions to initiate the conversation. Opportunities for regional collaboration in safer communities and justice were also tricky for the participants to identify so we didn't spend much time on this in the session, again this is something SCSN could develop in 2019.

Key highlights from the conversations were:

1. The **infrastructure to resource** this work is important and needs careful thought if it's not just to be conversations with the 'usual suspects', and unintentionally excludes already those excluded from conversations. **Capacity-building** within communities to upskill citizens in these discussions is also important; this takes time, commitment and investment. Some people also mentioned payment for civic duty or 'volunteering' to participate / fill gaps in service provision.
2. This could offer a real opportunity for **better use of budgets** and tie in with work on participatory budgeting (and other community empowerment stuff). There is a real opportunity to get a better understanding of where **services could be better joined up** – the **community sees these issues** much more clearly than organisations do. However, there were also concerns that this is/could be used as/could be seen as a cost saving exercise, and not about community empowerment.
3. Some of the group felt that community safety was too **'high risk'** an area for citizens to participate in. And were concerned about where **accountability** would sit in any new arrangements. Some were also querying whether this meant statutory services would be decided on by communities. This part of the conversation also highlighted potential issues with **accountability** and devolvement of power/decision making.
4. Many of the group welcomed increased citizen participation, and the **'virtuous circle'** of getting involved was mentioned. There was some concern that there wasn't an appetite for involvement, particularly from those not already active. There was lots of discussion about the best way to have these conversations – having mature and **honest conversations**, going out to the people not getting them to come to you were mentioned; remembering **accessibility issues, enablers or champion roles** within communities and public service organisations were proposed (elected members were specifically mentioned in relation to this final point).
5. Many people thought the starting point was **too broad** and people would struggle to think of ways in which they could get involved – **examples** would help e.g. films to show how it could work and to make it real. This would help citizens *and* people working in partnerships.
6. **Local autonomy** within the large **national organisations** was highlighted as a **barrier** to this piece of work progressing.

Event Feedback

We used an online survey using Survey Monkey as a way of collecting feedback from participants.

Survey results:

5/7 people gave the speaker/input four stars.

7 people rated the conversation as four stars; 4/3/7 people rated the conversations as three stars.

6/7 people gave the venue and catering three or four stars.

4/7 people gave the event overall four stars. 2 people gave it three stars and one person gave it two stars.

“...The presenter was very knowledgeable...Discussions were also good and useful to aid own responses”

Participant

“It would be good to have a follow session up once the consultation is reported to see how things will be taken forward. It was useful to look at how decisions are currently made and what would be helpful going forward”

Participant

“The business was conducted well but I thought more information would be available”.

Participant

Learning

Participants were asked How much they knew about local governance before the session and whether the event increased their understanding (they were asked to pitch their knowledge on a sliding scale of 0-100):

- Before the session average score 36. (Two people at 20 and one person at 60).

- Following the session average score 60. One person didn't think the event substantially increased their knowledge.

Finally, participants were asked what their main 'takeaway' was from the day, and whether there was anything they would do differently when they got back to work.

“Try to incorporate some of the learning into practical approaches towards delivering local priorities for community safety within our council area”

Participant

“Am in the position of moving to a new organisation – will be interesting to see how the public's voice is used to develop the services and priorities”

Participant

“Useful to learn more about the review and Scottish Government contact points; thought-provoking discussion about some thorny issues; liked the roundtable informal format”

Participant

“That we are not the only ones with concerns about this potential policy reform and that it could introduce complexity within sufficient training and accountability. Also our own concern that if not done properly could lead to continued exclusion of seldom heard groups.”

Participant

Reflections

We'd like to say a big thank you to Nick, and to our participants for asking questions, talking honestly and stepping into this new and complex area.

At SCSN we are going to continue these conversations in our network as the LG review moves into the next phase. We are also going to think about how we can share this learning more widely and how we can support people to do this and have these conversations locally. We will continue to link with the LG team at Scottish Government, CoSLA and Community Development Alliance and share learning with our network.

Our ask of you, if you attended on 30th October, or have read this learning report and want to get involved is that you keep these conversations going, challenge culture and uncertainty to these approaches and think about how you could take something of this into your own workplace or team to carve out your own small bit of change. Perhaps you could start by writing down all the places and mechanisms by which decisions are taken on safer communities and justice issues and see where communities are able to participate and have their voice heard or be actively involved in making decisions?

“Am keen to hear further updates on this piece of work and hopefully be involved at some level within my local area”
Participant

Recent developments...

Since the Masterclass there have been a number of developments on the Local Governance Review:

A **survey** by Professor James Mitchell from University of Edinburgh and COSLA over Summer 2018 received 29 responses from Local Authorities with the following broad themes emerging:

- **Asymmetric approaches** to governance: allowing for models of local governance to develop in light of local circumstances – one size does not fit all;
- **Collaboration and integration** across public services and councils: facilitating growing partnerships in depth as well as breadth where appropriate across clusters of councils regionally and community planning partners, third sector organisations and innovative community models;
- Exploring **regional approaches** allowing for economies of scale with flexible deployment at local level;
- **Subsidiarity, empowerment and participation**: extending current developments in participatory budgeting, local planning and deliberative democracy and role of community councils with emphasis on local flexibility;
- **Local democratic accountability**: extending current local democratic accountability into greater range of public services including health, justice and the economy;
- **Fiscal empowerment**: greater financial autonomy over resources available to provide services including discretionary local taxes, review of the application of financial measures in relation to policy initiatives or specific input measures, and opportunities for budget sharing across public service providers.

A development session with COSLA members is in the pipeline to build on their thoughts for regional collaboration and new models of local governance.

There were a number of regional events in late 2018 to discuss outputs from **‘Democracy Matters’ conversations**. The team stressed these were early responses and there were still more responses to be received and they would be fully analysed and shared in due course. The following is taken from a presentation given by the LG team at these events, and there is a lot that partnerships can learn from these when reflecting on their own activity.

People reflected some ways and types of involvement that were very rewarding, and positive experiences:

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF GETTING INVOLVED	Type of activity	Examples
Political action	Protests Campaigning Voting	Protest against racism Campaigning for asylum seekers' rights Voting in independence referendum
Having voices heard	Consultations Commissions Participatory budgeting	Having a say in how a local park was developed and managed <i>"Our voices were heard and reflected in the East Lothian Poverty Commission"</i> Dundee Decides
Being involved	Participating Volunteering Fundraising	Parent council, community councillor Volunteering at a local church <i>"Involved in fundraising for tall ship, great experience"</i>

But people also noted that they had negative experiences of getting involved too, with a few core themes.

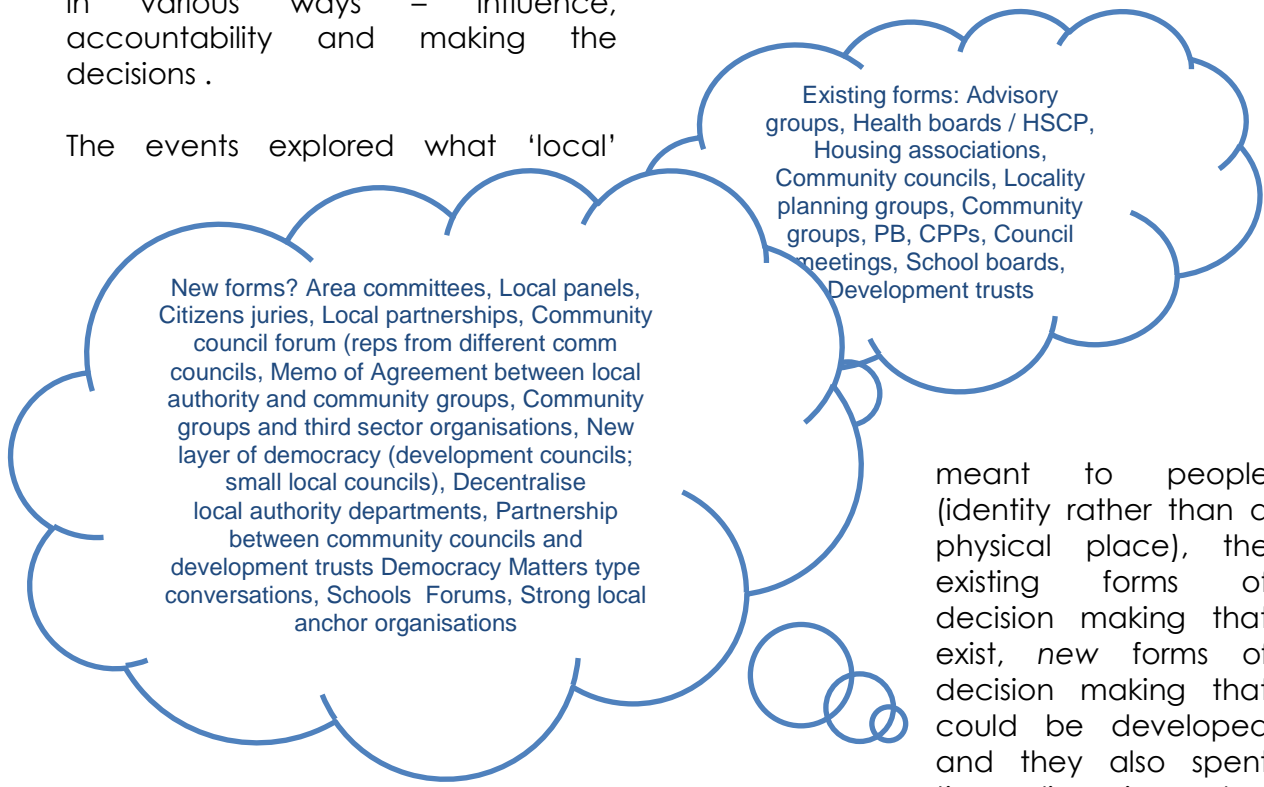
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES OF GETTING INVOLVED	Type of activity/structure	Examples
Poor communication	Consultation Committees	Consultation a tick-box exercise No follow up with community after consultations done
Tokenistic engagement	Consultations Planning decisions	Decisions made without or despite community voice <i>"Some items that come to community councils for comment are already decided"</i>
Lack of representation	Committees Community Planning Structures	<i>"We have no disabled people's participation at a planning or strategic level shaping the delivery of health and social care"</i>
Inaction	Complaints Consultations	Citizens filing complaints, not hearing back
Unwelcoming structures	Local area partnerships	Formal rules; citizens not encouraged to participate

A number of barriers to participation were noted including information, complexity, accessibility and lack of support and the limited styles of participation available.

	Description
Information	Lack of information about what committees exist (in public bodies and in the community) and who sits on them
Complexity	System complicated – difficult to understand who is responsible for what, how things work and how to influence
Accessibility	Transportation is poor – and expensive – in many areas <i>"Sometimes I'm at the youth club 30 minutes before it opens and have to leave 1-1/2 hours before it closes just to get the bus home."</i>
	A lot of activities happen during the day when many people are working
Lack of support for engagement	Many people having caring responsibilities For people who speak English as an additional language, it is hard to know what is going on, and to participate
Style of participation	The culture of meetings is off-putting for many <i>"Meetings are boring!!! We need new ways to get involved"</i> (young people)

Overall people wanted more control, particularly on local issues, and with defined parameters; but a small minority said no citing concerns that it's too much to ask of individuals, and that some decisions need to be made centrally. 'Control' was seen in various ways – influence, accountability and making the decisions .

The events explored what 'local'



meant to people (identity rather than a physical place), the existing forms of decision making that exist, new forms of decision making that could be developed and they also spent time discussing what

would have to change to make this happen. There is much for partnerships to reflect on and consider in this.

What is needed to make this happen?

Examples
Better representation in community councils
Councils required by law to consult with comm council on local development
Different ways of meeting – in libraries, schools, community centres
More accountability
More power to community councils
New layer of democracy / no new layer of democracy
Public bodies need to give up power
Remove barriers to participation
Remove gatekeepers
Trust
Safeguards in place to ensure local decisions do not do harm (eg to environment)
Support and capacity building so communities can participate

We will endeavour to keep you updated on developments in relation to the Democracy Matters and Strand 2 parts of the Local Governance Review.

We'd love to hear about what you're doing in relation to citizen participation and

any suggestions you have for us so get in touch with us at info@scsn.org.uk or 0131 225 7772 / 8700.

You can keep in touch with what we're up to at www.safercommunitiesScotland.org where you can also sign up for our monthly newsletter. Or Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter:



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