

Scottish Community Safety Network

Community Council Chair Survey June/July 2020



Introduction

Following the lockdown in late March 2020 due to the Covid19 pandemic, the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) contacted all Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to detail our offer of support at this time and find out from them how they were coping under the strain of COVID-19. We wanted to understand the immediate effect of this unprecedented situation on partnerships and the key emerging themes for community safety so far. The results from this initial survey can be found at: <https://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/2020/04/16/preliminary-report-of-covid-19-community-safety-partnerships-survey/>

Following the CSP survey, we were keen to find out how things have changed and begin to collectively think about the recovery and rebuilding/renewal phases and what this means for community safety and those working in the field. We know from conversations with our networks that citizens are playing a crucial role supporting communities and partners at this time and have great insight into the matters affecting communities. For these reasons we wanted to survey Scotland's Community Council Chairs to understand the key community safety issues during the Covid-19 pandemic and what the future might hold.

Between June 10th and July 30th SCSN invited Community Council Chairs across Scotland to participate in an online survey. The purpose of this survey was to:

1. Understand how Community Councils have responded to the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Explore their experiences.
3. Identify important community safety issues during difficult times.

The survey was distributed through SurveyMonkey and a total of 133 completed or partially completed responses were received. At present there are approximately 1200 Community Councils in Scotland. Although the survey was intended solely for Community Council Chairs, on receiving responses it appears though in some Community Councils, additional members from the same community council completed the survey. This potentially limits the validity of the collective picture of Community Council Chair experiences as some Community Councils have submitted more than one response. However, the responses and following analysis still provide rich narratives into how Community Councils experienced and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The majority of questions were open ended where respondents were free to write openly about their experiences and perspectives. Each respondent identified which Local Authority area they operate within and so further analysis is available on request for Community Council Chairs that want additional insight into their local authority area. Please email josh.box@scsn.org.uk for more information.

The analysis of the survey results is a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. NVIVO (text data analysis software) was used to do content analysis of the open-ended questions and code answers into categories. You will find Word Clouds and bar charts throughout this report that shows the salience of particular issues Community Council Chairs are facing. Also included are quotes that highlight the range of experiences across local authority areas in Scotland. For the multiple-choice questions, simple statistical methods were used to interpret and present data in frequency charts. Following the survey results a brief summary will be provided at the end of the report, highlighting key areas for further research and possible ways forward to improve community safety responses in future scenarios.

Survey Results

SCSN asked: *In which Local Authority area are you a Community Council Chair?*

Community Councils who completed or partially completed the survey were based in the following local authority areas:

Highland	23
Fife	20
Scottish Borders	16
Glasgow City	13
Aberdeen city	9
Argyll and Bute	7
South Lanarkshire	7
Angus	8
City of Edinburgh	3
Moray	3
Shetland Islands	3
West	
Dunbartonshire	3
West Lothian	3
Dundee City	2
East Renfrewshire	2
North Ayrshire	2
East Ayrshire	1
Inverclyde	1
Midlothian	1
Western Isles	1
Clackmannanshire	1
Aberdeenshire	4
TOTAL	133

We didn't receive any responses from Community councils based in the following local authority areas: Dumfries and Galloway, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, Falkirk, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

Key points:

- Community Council Chairs and members from the Highlands area provided the highest number of responses with 23 completed responses.
- Fife, Scottish Borders and Glasgow City had high response rates too.

- High response rates may be due to larger number of Community councils in those areas in addition to members completing the survey in addition to the chair.
- Low or no response rates from Community Councils may be because of time or technological limitations or other priorities. Some areas also have few or no community councils. We recognise that community councils are not the only form of community engagement and representation but for the purpose of this survey it was the most appropriate way forward.

SCSN asked: What have been the main issues for your communities during the pandemic regarding community safety?

Key points:

- Citizen Behaviour was the main safety issues identified by Community Council Chairs. Citizen behaviour means abiding by new restrictions, not putting people and communities risk at through perceived risky, selfish or dangerous behaviour.
- Providing support for citizens was also a high concern, as were communication between members and ensuring adequate food and provisions (e.g. prescriptions) for community members at the start of lockdown.
- 'Social distancing', 'visitors', and people 'ignoring', and 'not adhering' to new rules took precedence in participant responses signifying risky individual behaviour as a threat to community safety.
- Health and Wellbeing scored lowest however this may be because the timing of this survey was after the initial lockdown response but before the impact of health and wellbeing was apparent following the easing of restrictions.

Community Council Chairs said:

"Occasional abuse of outdoor/ green spaces by minority groups not maintaining social distancing + abusive/ unsafe behaviour, cycling on core paths with disregard to other users"

"Food and Medication deliveries to those shielding/self-isolation: keeping those shielding engaged with the community; lack of dog poo bags (libraries and local outlets closed); safety of walking route (state of bridge); inability to hold a meeting using video link"

"Cycling on pavements and in parks, joggers in parks and walkways and gatherings in parks"

"People coming into the area from other areas, potentially bringing C-19 with them"



SCSN asked: *Is there anything that you think has helped, or would help, to support your communities with these issues at this time?*

Key points:

- Community Council Chairs indicated that 'community responses' played a key role when responding to Community Safety issues. Examples of community responses include volunteering, support networks and collective action.
- Following 'community response', helpful support for communities included 'public services and government' (i.e. NHS, Police, Scottish Government), 'communication' (in particular between Community Council members), 'food and provisions' and 'individual citizen behaviour'. The quotes from Community Councils below illuminate and summarise these issues further.
- Responses highlighted the successes of collective responses of communities and groups and indicated that this approach was much more effective than individual citizen behaviour.
- Community Mapping exercises in local communities could enable Community Councils to better understand existing resources and assets in the community which in turn could help improve future responses.
- Further research or reflective learning processes could help identify and understand the assets-based approaches that led to success and help sustain them into the recovery and renewal processes.

"I feel that community spirit has been very much in evidence whether it be in formal groups or simply checking on a neighbour, everyone has played their part."

Community Council Chairs said:

On community response: *"Great volunteer response to run our local helpline and respond to help with shopping etc"*

"The community has pulled together really well. The weather helped. The elderly and families with children with special needs have been particularly well looked after. 20 volunteers were on duty over 110 plus days and collected over 300 shopping orders during that period for 16 households"

"All initiatives I have seen have been community generated and have been a huge success"

On public services and government:

"Rubbish up lifted very quickly from lay-by. Council bin collection has worked well and efficiently"

"The Council cleansing team has been exceptional given the mess they had to clear up every day"

On communication:

"Weekly notifications from the regeneration teams"

"Online meetings promoting good communication among community group"

"Zoom meetings have been great and kept us all in touch"

On food and provisions:

"The provision of a free hot meals service to those vulnerable people in our community was a success and should be considered to be run forward"

"Going well -Local restaurant delivering meals to people at high risk"

On individual citizen behaviour:

"People generally very well behaved and respected rules"

"Social distancing and the response of shops & essential businesses & clinics etc. has been most effective"

SCSN asked: Thinking about the emergency Coronavirus legislation, have you seen any impact of the legislation on the work that you do or the communities you represent?

Key points:

- Lockdown and social distancing had greatest impact on Community Council Chairs, meaning they had to change the way they conduct meetings and communicate with members and the local community.
- According to Community Councils, lockdown and travel restrictions had had a very large impact on businesses, local people and Community Council Members, some of who were shielding.

"Closed businesses, isolated families, frustrated young people, trepidation"

Has Helped during Covid-19

- There was a great deal of variation in responses around how community councils thought central vs local government has responded. In some cases, relationships strengthened, in others negative experiences and opinions with public bodies and government resulted in a sense of frustration and despair.
- Responses to this question often were in much broader contexts than community safety. Please bear this in mind when reading the quotes below.

Community Council Chairs said:

"Travel restrictions, work restrictions, more people working from home"

"Lockdown restriction obviously. This has devastated the tourist industry which is vital to our local economy"

"Difficult to say as it is how the legislation has been used that affects the community rather than the legislation itself"

"The Scottish government implemented some very good ideas that worked. However our local authority has been a shambles and not kept us informed"

"The move to enact the Coronavirus Act 2020 was a rushed decision and a huge mistake which cost the UK over 65'000 lives. It replaced existing law which would have seen much tighter control of the situation and placed obligations on Public Health offices to lead the pandemic response"



SCSN asked: *Has your 'normal' role as a CC Chair changed as a result of Covid19 pandemic? Please provide some details about the way in which your role has changed during this time.*

Key points:

- Communication played the most important role in changing the way Chairs conduct their work.
- Due to social distancing measures and a national lockdown, online video calling platforms such as Zoom, Skype and Teams were widely used. This was new territory for many Community Council Chairs.
- Digital communication such as emails and social media played a key role in keeping in touch with other members and the general public.

- 'Meetings' were cited as the most important change, predominantly meetings between Community Council members and with the public. Two Community Council Chairs spoke about the changes in how decision-making took place between members and councillors.
- A skills audit could be useful to identify Community Council Chairs that may require training in using digital technology as a few reported this was a barrier for them. For example, once Community Council Chair said: *"Whilst as a Community Council we have not been meeting, I have had to adjust to meeting others through Zoom. As we go forward I hope that we can increase our technological knowledge by undertaking some much needed lessons as a CC."*

"With no normal meetings, the chair, depute chair, secretary and treasurer have made decisions and passed to CC members for ratification"

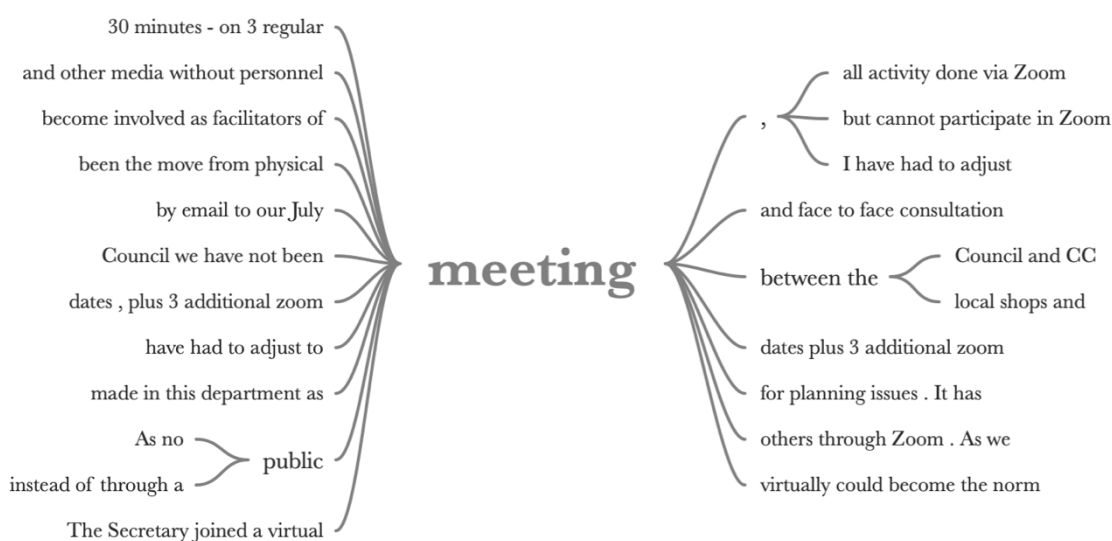
Community Council Chairs said:

"This has become much more intense with more phone calls (daily) and virtual meetings"

"CC has had no meetings, so members of the CC in the Resilience Group have reported to the rest of the CC by email, and to the community by the village website"

"Communications within a rural community setting has become more difficult with connectivity an issue for elderly residents and poor broadband"

The word map below gives a visual representation of how Community Council Chairs felt their role had changed in relation to meetings. They are direct quotes from responses which include the word 'meeting'.



SCSN asked: *How confident / reassured have you been in the action from organisations involved in the community safety response to the pandemic? This could*

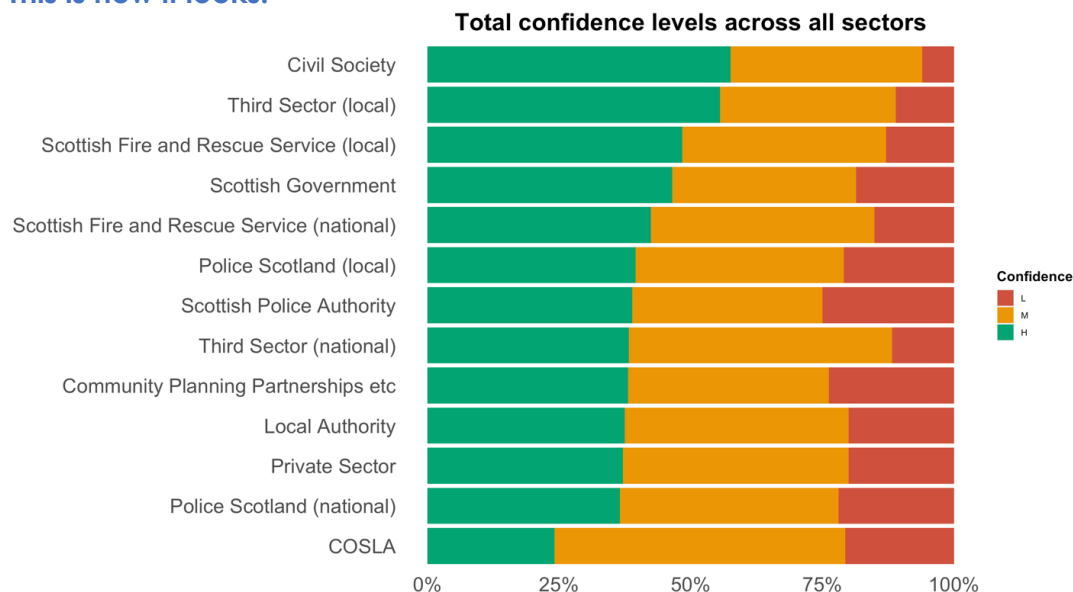
involve reflecting on things like information briefings, communication, partnership working, flexibility of response, funding etc.

Key points:

- Community Council Chairs had the highest confidence levels in Civil Society¹, followed closely by local third sector services. This echoes the responses found throughout the survey whereby Community Responses and local action were deemed to be the most effective approaches to addressing issues relating to community safety in the pandemic.
- Overall and for all of the organisations combined there were 198 high confidence ratings (41.6%), 193 medium confidence ratings (40.5%) and 85 low confidence ratings (17.9%).
- It is worth noting that the majority of responses were high or medium confidence, meaning that responses were, overall, adequate and effective. Those receiving low confidence may be due to reasons such as Community Council Chairs having limited contact with those services, or poor communication channels between them.

Community Council Chairs rated their confidence levels in organisations involved in community safety responses to the pandemic. Chairs voted "High", "Medium" or "Low" confidence levels for each organisation. In the stacked bar charts below the colour green = "High" confidence, Orange = "Medium" confidence, Red = "Low" confidence.

This is how it looks:



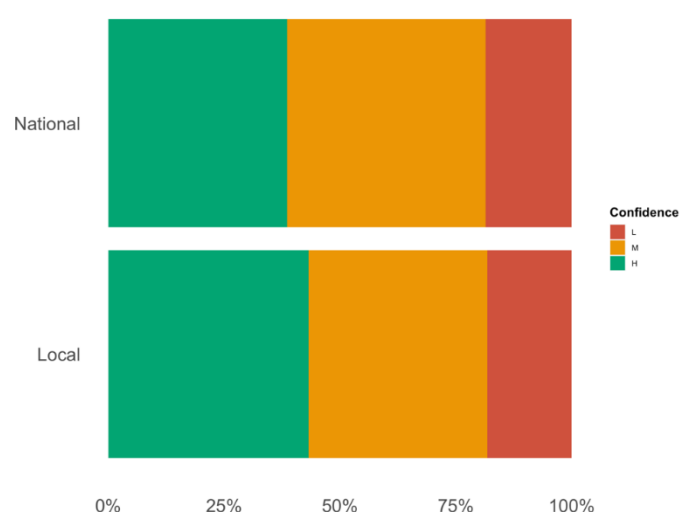
The bar stacked chart below shows total confidence levels in National Organisations and Local Organisations. The different organisations were grouped as follows:

¹ Civil Society: a community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity.

National organisations	Local organisations
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (national) Police Scotland (national) COSLA Scottish Government Third Sector (national) Scottish Police Authority	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (local) Police Scotland (local) Local Authority Third Sector (local) Community Planning Partnerships etc.

National organisations scored 19% low confidence votes, 43% medium confidence and 38% high confidence. Local organisations scored 18% low confidence, 39% medium confidence and 43% high confidence votes. Results from the survey show that Community Council Chairs had higher confidence in local organisations than national organisations. In addition, they were marginally more dissatisfied with national organisations in their response to Covid-19. Although unclear why in responses, this may be due to national organisations having less visible responses on the ground as compared with local services operating at community level. In contrast local organisations were seen more to empower local communities through collective action such as volunteering and being more visible on ground level and within communities (i.e. local police presence, bin uplifts etc.)

Confidence levels of Local and National Organisations



SCSN asked: At the time of asking The Scottish Government had recently published its 'roadmap' for easing restrictions. We asked: *As the restrictions begin to ease are you anticipating any particular community safety issues to emerge as a concern?*

Key points:

- Many responses indicate a need for Government policy and plans to reflect the needs of local communities and businesses.
- Community safety future concerns vary by locality. For example, community safety concerns in Fife and the Highlands include influxes of visitors / tourists, whilst in Glasgow City concerns were more around communicating information and guidance.
- Rises in unemployment and economic implications of the pandemic are major concerns across Community Councils.

Community Council Chairs said:

"Poverty and slowness of community to recover and how it affects vulnerable folk"

"Our town centre and shopping area is very vehicle oriented and there is not really enough people space to ensure social distancing and safe exercise. Space for queueing is very limited. Telephone signal is very poor making communication difficult sometimes leading to more isolation. Increasing youth nuisance as lockdown eases"

"a) access to food & impact of tourists re-entering our community b) economic impact of large scale unemployment, lack of jobs for young people leading to more depopulation, lack of foreign visitors, lack of investment finance for regeneration projects c) Effect on young people"



SCSN asked: Are there any issues you think SCSN should be prioritising for research or support in the future?

Key points:

- SCSN future priorities should include communication, influencing change, research, support and resources.
- SCSN could think about ways to condense and share complex policy information to help communities respond to community safety issues in future emergencies.
- Research into areas such as understanding the impact of community-led projects and getting feedback from local businesses on how they coped with Covid-19 measures could help for future planning.
- Responses to this question emphasised the importance of resilience in responding to new and emerging developments and future community safety emergencies. Although resilience wasn't defined in responses, Community Council chairs emphasised *community resilience* and *individual resilience*.
- Influencing change could look like pushing for local authorities to resource additional safety equipment, campaigning for safe spaces for young people to congregate and empowering local communities through their Community Councils.

Community Council Chairs said:

"Effective methods of communication that would allow the flow of any future pandemic to be handled efficiently"

"Widen the scope and emphasis on resilience. We don't know what is coming next..."

"The synthesis of Covid-19 research into formats which are easily understood by the public."

"Research the impact of and support for community led projects"

"Programs to make the public individually more resilient. Simple things like growing own veg. making own preserves from gathered fruits. Encouragement for home food preparation rather than relying on ready meals/carryouts"



Concluding Remarks

The results from this survey reveal the breadth of issues that community safety spans. Responses show how traditional community safety concerns such as antisocial behaviour, fly tipping and unintentional harm and injury are still major concerns. However, in addition to this are new community safety issues, in particular social distancing (or lack of), citizen behaviour and social isolation as a result of lockdown.

A major theme found throughout this survey and echoed in other recent surveys of Elected members and Community Safety Partnership leads, was that of the effectiveness of collective, localised community responses. Where it has been difficult for national policy and programmes to be communicated and implemented effectively, according to Community Council Chairs, local initiatives, especially those delivered by local third sectors and members of the community, were most impactful. In addition, strong, meaningful and transparent partnerships at local levels were deemed to have the strongest impact when responding to community safety issues during the pandemic.

Like vast swathes of society, online communication is key to keeping in touch for Community Councils. Where some Community councils have embraced the change and adapted quickly, others have struggled with the transition to using digital communication and technology. This poses a threat to community safety as well as engagement of Community Council Chairs in partnerships and scrutiny processes. A skills audit of Community Council Chairs would be very beneficial to support them to continue to function properly and contribute to strategic planning and decision making.

Community Council Chairs and members possess a huge amount of insight and experience within the field of community safety. Their voices collectively echo a change within the field of community safety, with individual citizen behaviour posing the biggest threat to public health outcomes (i.e. not adhering to social distancing or

flouting rules) and putting communities at risk. Conversely, collective action proves to be the most effective way of overcoming and reversing some of the damage done to communities as a result of Covid-19. Undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic impact will have huge implications for community safety. Rising crime, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, antisocial behaviour and increased inequality are a few of the potential impacts of lockdown and economic recession. Observations from Community Council Chairs already document the closing of businesses, isolated families, frustrated people and increasing health and mental health concerns of the communities they represent. As outlined by Community Councils, local, collective, transparent and citizen led initiatives appears to be the best approach to overcome current and future community safety concerns.