Democracy Matters
Your Community. Your Ideas. Your Future.

**Local Governance Review.**

**Community decision making:**
**What people told us.**

**Easy Read Summary.**

**Contents of this report.**

# About the Review.

The **Local Governance Review** started in December 2017. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) led the Review. COSLA supports local councils.

The Review looked at how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local government, and with communities.

There are two parts to the Review:

(1) Part one is "**Democracy Matters**". This is about how decisions are made in the community.

(2) Part two is about how decisions are made in public services and who makes these decisions.

## About Democracy Matters.

Democracy Matters supported ordinary people to tell the Scottish Government about their experiences of getting involved in their community.

The Scottish Government worked with lots of different organisations to work out the best ways to get people involved.

## About this report.

This report is about what people said to the Democracy Matters Review group.

The review group developed questions and materials to support people to have discussions in their community. These were designed to be as inclusive as possible.

They asked five sets of questions:

1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in making decisions in your local community or community of interest.

2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions?

   What sorts of issues would those decisions cover?

3. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?

4. What good ways are decisions made now?

   Are there new ways that could work well?

   What kinds of changes are needed?

5. Do you have any other comments, ideas or questions? Is there more you want to know?

# Ways that people got involved.

Democracy Matters gave people many different ways to run events and send back their views.

People were able to get involved in different ways:

- **Community conversations**: Many communities organised a local event to discuss the Democracy Matters questions.

- **13 regional events** were organised across Scotland in November and December 2018.

- **Individual responses**: people sent their own views by email or post.

- **Organisation responses**: organisations sent their views about decisions made in their community.

- **Democracy Matters postcard**: The postcard asked two of the questions. There was space to write a reply and send it back free of charge.

- **An online forum:** people were able to take part in an online discussion.

## What people told us about Democracy Matters.

This report explains what the people who took part in Democracy Matters said. It is only about their views and may not be what everyone in Scotland thinks about decision making.

# Who got involved in Democracy Matters.

There were 334 responses in total:

- 127 responses were from community conversations. Around 2967 people took part in community conversations.

- 61 individual people sent their views. 23 sent their views by email. 117 sent back the postcard. 21 completed the online form.

- 46 organisations sent in their own reports.

- Some organisations used events to gather views. Around 885 people were involved in organisation activities.


- 226 people attended the 13 regional events.

- Around 4240 people took part in Democracy Matters.


**Democracy Matters tried to be as inclusive as possible.**

This means that communities of place and communities of interest or identity were equally able to take part.

Events took place right across Scotland. 29 out of the 32 local council areas in Scotland held events. People living in cities, towns and villages took part.

Many different communities of interest or identity held community conversations and sent in reports.

**There were four types of community groups:**

**Identity**: people who shared a particular language, ethnic group or nationality. Also there were groups with shared experience around gender identity and sexuality.

**Life stage**: groups with shared experience as young people, students, parents, carers, and those who were retired.

**Experience**: groups with shared experiences of poverty, homelessness, living on benefits, people recovering from addiction, disabled people and those with long term health conditions.

**Interests**: groups with a shared interest in the environment, culture and the arts.

Most of the discussions held by communities of interest or identity reflected their own experience of discrimination.
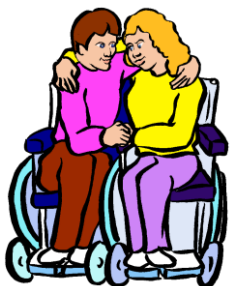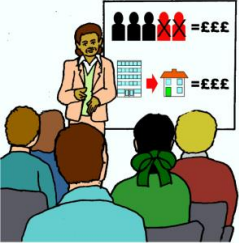
Some people experience many types of disadvantage or discrimination - sometimes called intersectionality.

# Experiences of local decision making.

People had positive and negative experiences of involvement in local decision making.

There were many more negative experiences than positive ones. Some people had no experience of involvement.

The positive experiences were things like taking part in activities and events in communities.

People said they had been involved in organising activities.

Some people had been involved in formal community organisations or committees.

**There were three kinds of positive involvement**:

- Political action and protesting.

- Making voices heard and influencing change.

- Being directly involved and taking decisions.

**The negative experiences people talked about were things like**:

- Bad communication.

- Tokenistic 'tick box' meetings. Decisions already taken so meeting has no effect.

- Lack of representation.

- Not feeling able to make change. Nothing happening after giving your views.

- Not feeling welcome or supported at meetings.

# Barriers to getting involved.

People gave examples of different kinds of barriers to getting involved. This means many people who have support needs cannot take part. The most common barriers were:

**Information** – things like:

- Not knowing how to be involved or where to get involved.
- Not understanding where and how decisions and taken.
- No accessible information for people who find it difficult to take part, or who have support needs.

**Complicated** – It is difficult to understand who is responsible for what, how things work and how to put forward views.

**Not accessible** – things like:

- Transport barriers mean people cannot get there.
- Working people cannot go to daytime meetings.
- There is not enough time to take part properly.
- Venues not accessible to disabled people.

**Lack of support to take part** – There is often no proper support to take part.

**Style of the meetings** - The language and behaviours of others at meetings mean some people do not feel welcome, safe or supported to take part.

# Community control of local decisions.

People do want to have more control of decisions on issues that matter to them. This is most important when decisions affect a local community.

**People talked about different types of control**:

- **Influence** – this means having a voice in decision making and those in control taking notice of what you say.

- **Transparency and accountability** – transparency is about being very open and clear about how decisions are made. Accountability is about people being able to ask decision makers why they made decisions. It is also about people making sure decisions are carried out properly.

- **Authority** – authority is about having the power to take decisions. It is also about having resources, like money and the right people, to carry out decisions properly

**Some people thought communities should not have power to make decisions**. They worried that:

- It may be too big a responsibility for local people.

- Communities may not have enough confidence or the right skills to make decisions.

- There may be too many local issues.

- Local people would be responsible for the decisions they made.
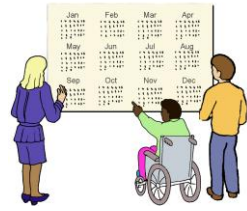
People in communities are interested in getting more involved in making many different types of decisions.

**Some communities felt strongly about certain issues that affected them**, for example:

- **Disadvantage** – not being able to have the same chances or services as other people.

- **Discrimination** – being treated badly or unfairly.

- **Negative parts** of their local area.

- **Quality** of local housing.

- **Access** to and use of public services, like schools, council services and health services.

Some communities spoke about decisions that would benefit the wider community and make the local area much nicer for everyone.

# Changes to local decision making.

Most people felt there should be changes to how local decisions are made.

Communities had ideas for changes to ways people could get involved in decisions that affect their community:

- **To be treated better by public authorities** – by a change in culture and behaviour about involving communities in decisions.

- **To be better connected** – people in communities working together to share skills and knowledge. People in communities having better links with decision makers.

- **To be able to take part in decisions** about their community. Some communities want more local control over decisions and the right resources.

- **Decision makers should use the knowledge and experience of people in the community**. Decisions should lead to action that improves the lives of people in the community.

# How people describe their 'local' community.

People described their community in different ways.

For example, 'my town', 'my village', 'the neighbourhood'.

Some people think of a community as a public service area, like a council area, or a health board area.

Other people talked about a community around a school or church, or around the local shops.

Some people thought about the size of an area, or distance between other communities.

Some people talked about online communities.

Some people said that sometimes it is more about the issue than the area. For example, issues affect whole cities, or whole regions or even the whole of Scotland. Sometimes decisions need to be taken at these different levels.

Many people said their local social connections, and a shared sense of identity and belonging were important to them. Communities of interest or identity described local around shared experience and identity.

A few people thought that community decision making might need to consider the numbers of people in a community.

# Types of community decision making.

There are already ways for communities to make decisions in Scotland. For example:

- Community councils.

- Community development trusts.

- Community housing associations.

- Local community organisation partnerships.

- Local planning and advisory groups.

- Community planning partnerships.

- School boards and parent councils.

- Scottish rural and youth parliaments.

- Participatory budgeting arrangements.

- Local third sector organisations.

- Other local community forums.

**Many people said changes to some of these were needed.** This would help more people get involved in local decision making.

Different ways to take part would suit different communities.

Many people supported the idea of community councils having more local power as long as there were some changes.

There were some very negative views about community councils and many people felt they should not have local decision making powers.

# Making local decision easier and fairer.

People described three main way to make local decision making easier and fairer. These were:

- Support people to take part.
- Build people into the system.
- Change the culture and behaviour of public authorities.

People described some positive values they want to see that would support people to take part. For example:

- How public authorities should treat communities.
- How communities and public authorities should work together.
- New ways of working in partnership that result in practical ways to improve the lives of people and communities.

Some community organisations who already have experience of local decision making, described ways to make community decision making better.

Some organisations felt new levels of powers should be created in communities. Others strongly disagreed with this idea. Many said that power to take decisions needs the right resources to deliver decisions.

# Ideas to improve local decision making.

A few organisations sent in detailed ideas for better local decision making. Ideas included how it could be organised, how communities would feel listened to and how they could fit into the current system of decision making.

Communities suggested lot of ways that would help improve community involvement in, or control over, decisions. For example:

- **Learning about rights and responsibilities as citizens**. This needs people to have information about:
    - How public authorities take decisions.
    - Which public authorities take decisions.
    - How people can get involved in decisions.

- **Training** community groups to build their confidence and skills to take on more responsibility.

- **Greater power over decisions** made by public authorities. Better ways to make them explain their decisions and put them into action.

- **Community participation** – taking part in formal decision making, like area committees and local community planning groups.

- **New types of community control**. This could be about changing the purpose and powers of community organisations. It might be designing completely new decision making organisations.

**More information.**

If you want to find out more about Democracy Matters please look on the website.

@CommEmpower
www.gov.scot/democracymatters

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