

**Scotland's National Open Government
Action Plan 2018-20: Commitment 4**

**Improving Access to
Accountability of Public
Services: Peoples &
Stakeholder Engagement**

**Final Report and Recommendations
July 2020**

September 2020



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Accountability of Public Services: Citizen Engagement

Final Report and Recommendations
July 2020

snook

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Executive Summary

Snook were commissioned by the Scottish Government in September 2019 to explore Commitment 4 of the Open Government National Action Plan: improving citizens' access to accountability of public services. Through public engagement activities and events with public sector stakeholders, this piece of work identified the common journeys through, and barriers to, accessing accountability in Scotland. While 16 key themes emerged from the research, they were grouped within the following four categories, which represent areas that require attention:

1. A lack of transparency

A general lack of transparency of information, behind the scenes processing, process expectations, and decision-making created key barriers to access of accountability. The public were unable to understand why public decisions had been made, which led to a lack of trust in public services and bodies. Often, people did not receive replies when making accountability requests, and were unable to understand how their enquiries were being processed. When accountability processes ended, they were unaware if and how their input had contributed towards intended change.

2. Disempowerment of users and staff

Disempowerment of the public and service delivery staff was caused by a lack of support from the public sector to participate in accountability processes. Existing accountability processes reduced the ability for staff and users to engage at a human-level and participate in active listening. Past negative experiences of accountability and public consultation had left citizens feeling unsupported to participate.

3. A lack of accessibility

Poor access to advocacy and support created practical barriers to participation in accountability. Communication methods between users and services often did not meet the needs of the public and left them feeling excluded from accountability processes and uncared for by public bodies.

4. Cultures of opposition

The public reported a general attitude of opposition across the public sector. They believed that an 'us vs them' mentality existed, which resulted in feedback from the public being disregarded and viewed as inconvenient instead of valuable. The public were often not involved in solution-finding and did not trust public bodies to use their input to make positive change.

Key barriers and user needs within the categorised themes is further explored in this report.

Opportunities for improvements, including existing resources and examples of best practice have also been summarised. In response, three recommendations have been proposed, each one producing outcomes and findings that inform the next. As such, it is suggested that they be undertaken in concurrence:

1a. Investigating the barriers and opportunities to support access to accountability within service delivery, with a focus on practical ‘on the ground’ staff needs.

Many national policies, guidance, and standards that support public access to accountability already exist, and access to accountability processes remains dependant on the practices of ‘on the ground’ service delivery staff. This review would investigate the barriers that staff face in supporting citizens to access accountability and delivering accountability processes that meet public needs.

1b. A review of current solutions and examples of good practice that support access to accountability in Scotland.

Examples of good practice and access exist across Scotland, with a lack of consistency. By taking an asset-based approach to solution development, existing pockets of success in Scotland could be translated into case studies to support national learning and development in relation to accountability. This piece of work would review the qualities of these successful examples and apply these learnings to the barriers that operational service delivery staff face, as identified in recommendation 1a, to identify asset-based opportunities.

2. The formation of a People’s Panel and Community of Practice to develop pilot “tests of change”.

The opportunities in response to the themes as outlined in this report, and the findings from recommendations 1a and 1b, could be developed into pilot solutions and tested. It is recommended that this process of testing and development should be undertaken by a People's Panel, who would represent the residents of Scotland, and a Community of Practice, who would represent public sector stakeholders and decision-makers. The formation of these working groups could contribute to a longer term commitment to trust building and continuous learning and development in relation to accountability.

Summary of the brief

Scotland is a member of the Open Government Partnership, an international collaboration of 90 governments across the world committed to three key principles of openness, transparency and public involvement. In delivering on these principles, the Scottish Government, COSLA, and the wider public, have partnered to take forward Scotland's second National Open Government Action Plan, 2018-20.

In September 2019, Snook were commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct research with the diverse residents of Scotland, exploring Commitment 4 of the Open Government National Action Plan: **improving citizens' access to accountability of public services**.

Through national public engagement activities, Snook captured the real stories and experiences of public service accountability from a representative selection of Scottish residents. The main barriers to accessing accountability of public services in Scotland were identified and, through engagement with service delivery, civic society, scrutiny bodies, and wider decision making representatives, these were translated into opportunities for improvement.

Snook's qualitative investigation is complemented by a quantitative survey study conducted by Citizens Advice Scotland and YouGov, which outlines an overview of the public's understanding and experiences of complaints processes in Scotland..

Intended outputs and adjustments

Intended project outputs included opportunities for 'tests of change'. These would address the most significant challenges and barriers in accessing effective accountability experienced by people living in Scotland.

The establishment of a People's Panel was required to then prototype and test pilot solutions with a representative sample of Scottish residents. Due to the constraints of COVID-19, the project was unable to establish the People's Panel. Instead, two digital stakeholder events were hosted to develop propositions for solution development: one with service delivery representatives, and another with public sector and civic society representatives and scrutiny bodies.

About this report

This report outlines the methodology and findings from the research, along with a set of recommendations for further action. These will be considered by the Scottish Government and the Open Government Commitment 4 Collaborative Working Group, to inform next steps in delivery and the development and testing of pilot solutions.

The findings from this report are reflective of the public's experiences and perceptions of access to accountability of public services in Scotland, and representative of the individuals who participated in the research.

If you have further inquiries about the report, please contact Zoë Prosser at zoe.prosser@wearesnook.com

Interviews

Eight one-to-one interviews were conducted with residents from around Scotland. Over the phone or in person, their experiences of accountability were collaboratively mapped. The interviews focused on identifying typical journeys through accountability, common barriers and motivators for accessing accountability, and examples of best practice.

Inclusivity gatherings

To fill inclusivity gaps, three small discussion groups were hosted with targeted audiences, for example those seeking asylum or refuge, and additional support. This reached eight people and allowed us to understand anomalies in the research and barriers for those with specific needs.

National events

National events were hosted in five locations across Scotland, involving over 70 citizens. In each location, two events were organised and, where participation was low, researchers conducted ad hoc conversations with local residents. Journeys through accountability and common barriers were translated into opportunities for solutions. Examples of best practice were validated and developed, and these formed a basic definition of accountability as defined by the public (see Appendix 1).

Stakeholder event: public sector representatives

An online stakeholder event was hosted with 20 decision-makers from public sector organisations, bodies and services. Common user journeys, barriers and motivators for accessing accountability were presented and discussed. Centred around the individual stages of common user journeys, this event asked participants to collaboratively build a 'behind the scenes' narrative from the service delivery perspective. This helped to identify service delivery barriers and constraints for supporting access to accountability.

Stakeholder event: solutions development

This online event brought together 18 representatives from scrutiny bodies, public and third sector decision making, as well as the public to explore emerging themes from the research. These themes represented the common barriers to access, user needs, and system-level constraints within accountability. Participants worked in groups to translate these themes into opportunities for solutions and identified existing workstreams, resources and case studies that might support the development of the solutions.

Accessibility commitment

The accessibility requirements of participants were considered at all stages of public engagement. Budget was allocated to supporting participants' travel costs and the inclusion of their carers, support workers, or interpreters. All conversations and workshop materials were designed to be accessible for people with low or no literacy levels. Objects, illustrations, and extra facilitators were utilised to respond to individual communication needs. Each participant was offered access to communicate with the project team before their engagement to develop bespoke approaches in response to their needs.

Inbuilt accountability

The project team built accountability measures into the working processes of the project. For example, at all stages of public engagement, participants were encouraged to provide feedback on what did and did not work well for them. They were encouraged to provide private feedback, request further information about the project, and contribute their ideas via phone and email.

Recruitment approach

Recruitment was conducted through local community groups, posters, newspapers, and social media to ensure that digital access was not a requirement of participation, and to reach individuals who were not usually engaged.

National event representation

The national events were conducted in Alloa, Dumfries, Dundee, Tarbert, and Fort William. These locations were chosen because of their regular underrepresentation and to include cities, large towns, and rural locations.

Journey Maps

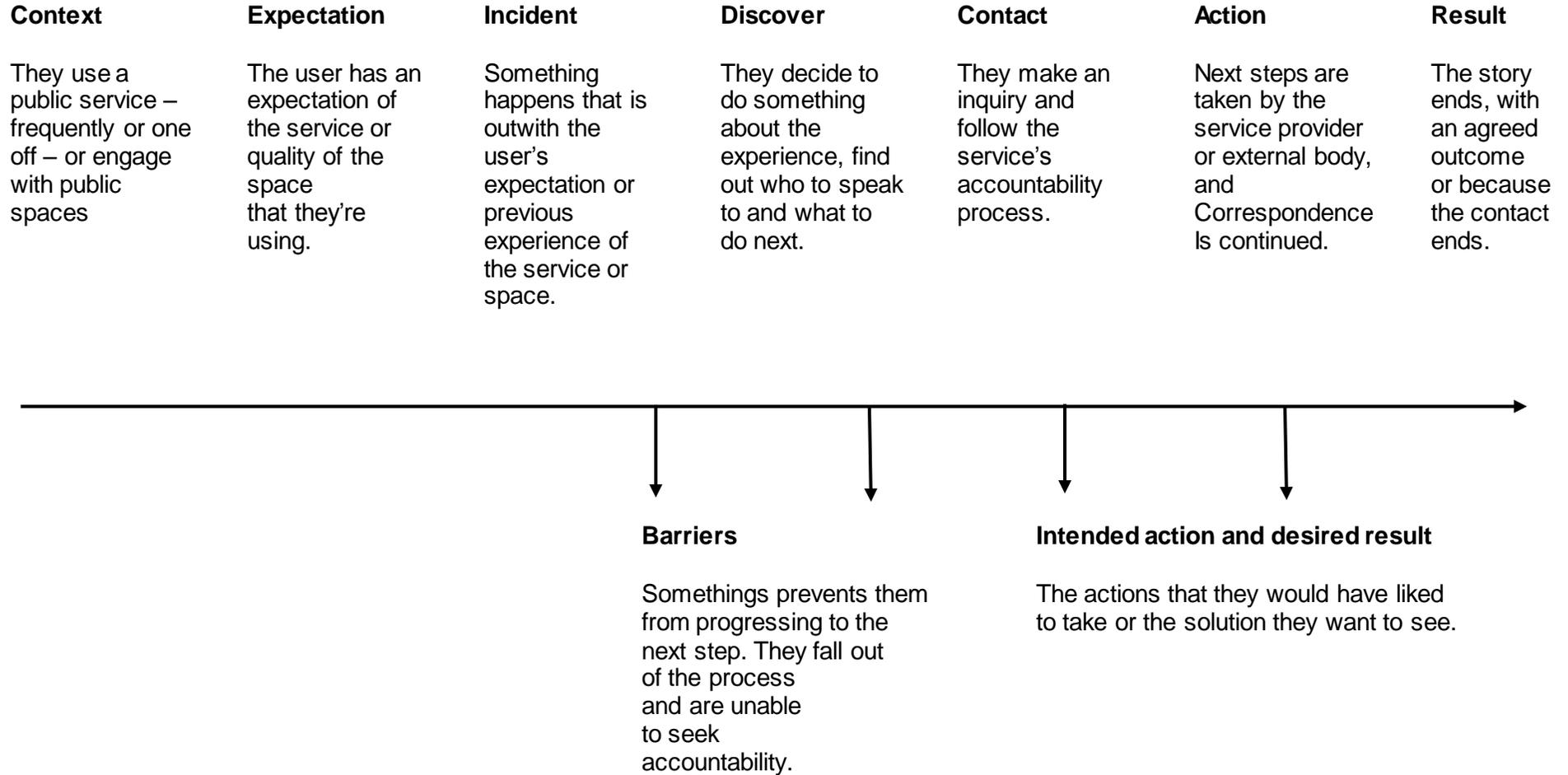
Key Journey Stages

From an analysis of people's experiences of public service use, two key common journeys were identified in relation to accountability:

1. When a person uses a public service and experiences a failure of service delivery or is dissatisfied and does not attempt to access accountability.
2. When a person uses a public service and experiences a failure of service delivery or is dissatisfied, and accesses accountability processes.

Within both of these typical journeys, there were barriers to access at all stages. The illustration on the follow page outlines a high-level roadmap of these accountability journeys, including common drop off points.

Accountability Process



User Journeys

Experiences of public service accountability in Scotland, collected throughout the public engagement activities, were anonymised and synthesised into three user journeys.

This process of amalgamating real-life stories ensures that, while individual experiences are included, details cannot be attributed to any one account and anonymity is maintained.

Between them, the user journeys represent all of the key themes associated with this study.

User Journey 1

Seeking accountability for decisions taken around cessation of services

1. Context

The local Integration Joint Board (IJB) proposed they would close a specialist dementia ward; the only such ward in a rural area. This proposal was put forward in a report that outlined three options for alternative provision, but the closure of the ward itself was a part of each of the proposals. The report also recommended the selection of one option in particular.

The community did not feel that they understood why the decision had been taken, nor that the proposed alternatives were adequate. They also felt that, although recommendations had been put forward, the final option had already been selected. Staff felt intimidated and punished for speaking out.

2. Incident

Staff and patient families did not feel that they had been involved in creating the options put forward, and that the decision had come as a shock.

They researched and created their own alternative proposal, and put that forward to the IJB. They didn't feel that their proposal was adequately acknowledged, but were determined that it be considered as part of the final decision.

News of the proposals spread informally through the community, and a group was formed to try and save the service.

3. Discover and contact

Through personal contacts, Helen, a member of the community group, was able to speak to a senior figure in the IJB. They spoke for over an hour on the phone.

The representative from the IJB appeared to agree with Helen's suggestions, but Helen felt it was clear they were not going to happen since they weren't part of the options put forward. Helen felt humoured and that she was being controlled.

During this call, Helen and other members of the group were invited to attend an IJB meeting where the matter was to be discussed. It was implied that they would be there to represent the views of the community and to join in the discussion.

The community group created a Facebook group to raise awareness in the wider community and worked with UNISON.

4. Action

Poor communication from the IJB ahead of the meeting led to a demonstration held by the community group on the day of the session. They wanted to make sure that the IJB could see that the community was concerned about the proposals.

As the meeting began, the group tried to join, but an attempt was made to turn them away on the basis that there weren't enough seats available. After some discussion, extra seats were found.

During the meeting it was agreed that the IJB would proceed with the recommendation put forward in the report, and that they would undertake public consultation before the next IJB meeting, when the decision would be finalised.

The community group began to feel that it was a hopeless situation, as none of their efforts seemed to make an impact. They were perplexed that public consultation was to take place so late in the process.

5. Result

After the IJB meeting there was no further engagement with the community group. The group wrote to their MP, MSPs and the Health Minister to seek their intervention. They told elected representatives that without their support their next step would be to heighten their concerns through the press.

They did not receive a reply and soon after were featured in national news. They felt that the press was the only option for accountability open to them, as elected and unelected officials had disengaged from the process.

The consultation began only two weeks before the next IJB meeting. The wider community felt that the consultation was not handled well and that there was no real discussion. They didn't see how their views would be incorporated into the decision making process.

While the local community rejected the proposals, the proposals were approved following a wider regional consultation of the proposals. There was also disagreement as to whether staff were adequately consulted, or consulted at all.

The community had really come together over this issue. The group and others gave a lot of time, energy and resources to collaborate on researching, on seeking the views of the wider community and building a solutions-based case. However, no response was given and the situation did not change.

At the next IJB meeting the final decision was taken; to follow the original recommendation despite the efforts of the community. The community were left feeling disempowered and that the process was intimidating. They questioned whether they would spend their time, energy and emotion on seeking accountability again.

User Journey 2 Carer Seeking Support

1. Context

Sally is a carer for her son, Adam, 21, who suffers from autism. She receives support from a social worker, but predominantly cares for him alone at home.

Adam can be difficult to manage because of his medical condition, and a number of past care workers have refused to continue their visits. Sally has made a number of complaints about carers not showing up, or not being equipped to deal with Adam's condition.

They live in a small village with a limited number of carers and social workers, which has left them feeling isolated and unable to ask for help.

Sally believes the support systems in her area treat her differently because of this: "They just think I'm difficult to deal with and can't be bothered with us anymore."

2. Incident

Sally was in an accident and could no longer physically support Adam around the house. She spoke to a care worker, expressing her need for more support. The carer agreed that Adam needed more care, but her department was short on staff and she didn't know of any specialist care homes. She told Sally that nothing could be done and she'd have to make do.

Sally was frustrated because she didn't believe the carer had the authority to make this decision.

3. Discover

Sally phoned the social care support number on her council's website, as she had done before, to explain the change in circumstances.

The lady on the phone told her to write to the local health and social care complaints service and gave her the address.

4. Contact

Sally wrote and posted the letter.

After one week she still hadn't heard back, so she called the council again and reiterated the urgency of the situation.

The council agreed to send an occupational therapist to the house to evaluate Adam, something that needed to be done before he could be assigned more care support.

5. Action

Sally was annoyed that the care worker she spoke to initially was not clear about her need for an occupational therapist evaluation before more care support could be offered to Adam.

Instead, they encouraged her to write a complaints letter, which turned out to be the wrong process and wasted time. She was left feeling confused by a lack of clear guidance, and worried that the council weren't guiding her through the right processes to enable her to receive immediate care support.

The occupational therapist didn't come out to visit for another three weeks, and told Sally that it would take a further 4-8 weeks to log the assessment and process the request.

Sally felt extremely frustrated and hopeless. She was unsure whether the council would assign any more support to Adam, and couldn't wait another month or two to find out. She started searching for alternative options online, and came across the Autism Network Scotland.

She attended one of their support groups for carers in her area and learned a lot about the various types of support available.

The group helped Sally with a self-referral process, and provided her with advocacy to support correspondence with her council and social workers.

6. Result

Through the support of Autism Network Scotland and their advocacy via self-referral, Sally managed to find Adam a place in a specialist care home for adults with learning disabilities not too far away.

Sally learned a lot more about the support available for adults with learning disabilities, having read up on policy guidance and strategies for autism, which she found through the Network.

She was frustrated that she had to become an expert in navigating the system herself, and, wanting to help others who might be in Adam's position, she wrote to her council and suggested that social care in the area should be aware of the

Scottish Strategy for Autism. She was hoping to see them implement a better referral system, but didn't receive a reply.

Eventually she became a volunteer for Autism Network Scotland and now runs her local community support group.

User Journey 3 Neighbourhood Planning Appeal

1. Context

Jason received a planning notice from the council through his letterbox, letting him know that his next door neighbour was going to build a large extension that would obstruct his family's views, and that the building work would go on for at least 13 months.

2. Incident

Jason was surprised by the planning notice as there was no notification for consultation before planning permission had been granted, leaving him and his family feeling cheated by the notification. After asking around, he found that many of his neighbours had received the same letter and were equally frustrated, but didn't want to make any objection to the extension as they thought it would be making an unnecessary fuss.

On top of this, they were worried about ruining relationships with the neighbour, they couldn't be bothered spending time on the process or arguing about it, and because they didn't know they had a right to complain.

3. Discover

Jason didn't know what to do, and felt helpless because his neighbours weren't being active.

He tried contacting the number on the planning notice, but was told this was the wrong contact for an objection. He searched on the council website but couldn't figure out who to contact or what the process might be. Then he phoned his friend who worked as a council employee. They told him to speak to a planning officer and to get support from neighbours to write an official objection letter.

4. Contact

Since Jason was so unclear about the process and felt pressured to work with his neighbours to put together an objection, he wanted some advice from the planning department.

However, when he phoned the council and asked to be put through, they told him to write an official appeal letter. He didn't know how to present his case, or what information to include. He had to google information on this, and looked at examples so he could work out what an appeal letter should look like.

5. Action

He then tried to get his neighbours together to write a joint appeal, as advised by his friend. However, he had no clarity on what needed to be done, what the process would look like, or what an outcome might look like. This made it difficult to get his neighbours on board, and further complicated the start of the process.

The appeal then went to a planning committee, but neither Jason nor any of the neighbours were invited. They didn't know what would happen at the committee, or how they would be informed of any decisions. This left Jason and his neighbours confused, as they had followed the process to no avail and had not been brought along or considered during the decision making process.

6. Result

Jason and his neighbours were left with no knowledge of the decision and felt forgotten about. The work being done on their neighbour's home stalled, but Jason was too concerned to talk to them about it in case it damaged their relationship as neighbours.

He didn't want to keep pushing the council, and felt that he was becoming an annoyance, even though he had valid reasons to object to the planning notice. He is now afraid of the repercussions in the neighbourhood should he and the neighbours continue to push the case.

Key Themes

Introduction to the Themes

The key themes from this research emerged from public engagement activities, and were refined through two stakeholder events.

During these events, facilitated discussions with service delivery representatives and wider decision makers informed a well-rounded understanding of the thematic issues. Service-user experiences were complimented with an understanding of the back-end service processes and wider systemic constraints.

Each key theme is grouped within the adjacent four categories, and is individually presented through the following qualities:

- **Context:** summary of the most significant challenges to access to accountability of public bodies that need to be overcome.
- **User needs:** the needs of service users to access accountability.
- **Constraints:** the service-level constraints that respond to user needs.
- **Opportunities:** ideas and opportunities for improvements and solutions.
- **Resources and considerations:** existing resources and work streams that would support improvements.

Theme Category 1: A Lack of Transparency

The access to information that allows the public to understand and trust accountability of public services

Theme Category 2: Disempowerment of Users and Staff

The roles and responsibilities of public bodies, services, staff, and the public required to support accountability

Theme Category 3: A Lack of Accessibility

The formats, support systems, and routes to access accountability that the public requires

Theme Category 4: Cultures of Opposition

The attitudes and ways in which services and the public work together to make decisions and find solutions

A Lack of Transparency

Theme 1

I couldn't understand what decisions had been made or why

...so I lost trust in the organisation to act in the community's best interest.

Context

When decision making is not transparent, trust within the public sector can be lost. Often, people who sought accountability were doing so in relation to public decisions that had been made without their involvement, for example, cuts to health and social care provision in their areas. They wanted to understand the reasons for particular decisions, and to be given appropriate timeframes and processes to appeal these decisions.

People often believed that public services and bodies used jargon or complex language to mask decision making: "service providers shouldn't be able to hide behind language". This opaqueness led to a general distrust of local authorities, especially in relation to decision making, unclear agendas, and public spending.

User needs

- I need to understand how local decisions are made to ensure I don't become suspicious, especially of public spending.
- I need to understand what decisions are being made and how they affect me.
- I need to know why these decisions have been made and by whom.
- I need to be given opportunities to participate in decision making so that I can be represented in the decision and don't lose trust.
- I need decisions to be clearly communicated in an accessible way to prevent ambiguity and disengagement.

Constraints

- Obligations to publish information proactively exist in freedom of information law. Are services meeting these obligations? If they are struggling, then why?
- Being open about decisions and information is not enough to be considered transparent. Considerations must be given to how and where information is published and shared, and how it is interpreted by those affected.
- When services don't make the drivers behind their decisions clear, communities can't understand why they have been taken.

Theme 1 Opportunities

Proactive publication

There is an opportunity to promote the proactive publication of decision making processes, and the evidence and rationale behind them, within public bodies. Public services could also be supported to publish as much information as they possibly can. This would take the responsibility from the public for having to seek out information that should already be publicly available.

Public bodies could proactively work with national and local press to disseminate accurate and honest information, with a view to gaining control of and developing their inbuilt accountability.

Resources and considerations

- The Freedom of Information Act 2000 supports the public's right to access information held by public authorities. This includes a responsibility for these authorities to share information, without waiting for a request. There is evidence that people are less likely to make FOI requests if they can access the information online.

Communication and content design

To ensure transparency of information, public authorities must also consider the accessibility of content. There is an opportunity to design communication methods and content to meet the accessibility needs of everyone in Scotland. By being truly transparent, and by making information open and accessible from the beginning, services could gain the trust of those they serve and reduce the overall need for accountability inquiries.

Public bodies must consider the way information is presented - going beyond the publication of full texts. Tools such as infographic and bullet-point summaries enable a wider section of the public to engage with information and understand decisions which might impact upon them.

Resources and considerations

- The Equality Act 2010 already outlines a need for equal access in the UK.
- This requires increased resource in communications, but ultimately it provides increased accountability of and trust in our public services

A human-rights based approach

Often, there is a statutory requirement to inform people of their right to seek accountability. However, education programmes are often only attended by those who already have strong voices within communities, thus enforcing inequalities in access. While capacity-building activities are reported to work well by capacity-building organisations, attendees are often self-selecting.

There is an opportunity to support public bodies and services to build a human rights-based approach into delivery. This might involve promoting the public to take action on their rights, and supporting them to exercise their rights without having to know them specifically: essentially, taking the responsibility off the public.

Resources and considerations

- Public services and bodies often require the public to know their specific rights to be able to exercise them. However many members of the general public do not have the capacity to undertake education in relation to their rights: “I shouldn’t have to be an expert to have my problem solved”.
- The Scottish Human Rights Commission has developed the PANEL framework (standing for Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality) to support the integration of human rights into policies and public processes.

Theme 2

I didn't receive a reply or acknowledgement of my inquiry

...so I felt that no-one cared - I was disempowered and shut out of the system.

Context

It was common for people to receive no response to their initial enquiry, and this was often the point at which people gave up: "It's like talking to a brick wall", said one person who had consistently received no response to their phone calls and letters.

In some cases, services diverted from their set processes and prevented the public from seeking accountability. This put the onus on the individual to seek accountability through other means, for example by involving an MP.

A lack of response often left people believing that services did not care about them or their needs: "They don't care about what my needs really are. I felt accused of wasting their time and that I didn't need help, even though I am struggling with care duties at home".

It left them feeling disempowered and without answers: "I just want a chance to sit down with them and work out the details in an open conversation".

User needs

- I need acknowledgement of my inquiry so that I know it has been received.
- I need a reply that responds directly to my enquiry so that I know it has been understood.
- I need a reply that sets out the next steps so that I know what to expect.
- I need the response to be empathetic so that I don't feel helpless and become disempowered.

Constraints

- When services fail to engage with a member of the public or a community group, then the community have the power to set the public narrative, and might do so with limited facts.

Theme 2 Opportunities

Transparent processes

There is an opportunity for public bodies and services to use transparency of their processes to help overcome the public's feelings of 'being forgotten about'.

Often, responses from public bodies are delayed due to high volumes of requests and limited resources. By allowing them to visually understand how their inquiry is being processed, who is dealing with it behind the scenes, and offering an expectation of timelines, they would offer the public reassurance.

Resources and considerations

- Many private sector services offer visual and verbal illustrations of inquiry journeys to let individuals understand steps in the process.
- The responsibility to provide an overview of accountability processes for the public might be more effectively managed by a specifically appointed public body. This would reduce the need for service delivery staff to continuously update individuals on their enquiries, which causes inconsistency and a drain on resources.

A quick response and action

By responding quickly to an enquiry and following up with immediate actions, longer processes can be avoided.

“If people feel listened to, they are less likely to feel disempowered or disconnected. People know not everything is good news all the time, but they need to know that proper consideration has been given to what they are asking about” - Participant from Stakeholder Event.

Resources and considerations

- In order to act quickly, staff need to be empowered to make decisions and carry out appropriate actions

Shift from process focus to human focus

Staff need to be empowered to work with service users empathetically, rather than being held to unsympathetic processes. Equality and diversity training and tools can help organisations to achieve this.

Resources and considerations

- Consideration needs to be given as to how to maintain the standards that a process focus seeks to provide.

Theme 3

I wasn't able to see what was going on behind the scenes

...so I wasn't able to judge whether the service was doing what it was meant to do or not.

Context

For accountability to be successful, processes need to be clear and public bodies need to evidence that they are following them.

When public bodies did not appear to be following their own processes, people felt too powerless to seek out accountability.

People believed that clear and working processes should:

- Tell people what to expect when following an accountability process.

- Make expected process stages and timeframes clear from the beginning.
- Update the person of their inquiry's progress throughout the process.
- Be able to pull in the right people (e.g. experts) at the right time, and in ways that meet people's needs.
- Promptly respond to inquiries.

"There should be a known process to complain. It should be easy to access."

"Clarity is important. I should know what to do and how to do it clearly."

"Must be person-centred, not driven by the pencil."

User needs

- I need to know what to expect from a service so that I can hold it to account when it fails to deliver this.
- I need to have clear communication on accountability processes so that I know what to expect.

Constraints

- There are already process requirements under model complaints handling, but these should be more consistently implemented.
- Issues around delivering accountability processes might be related to individual public service delivery behaviour, and not only process rules.
- The public see public bodies as holding the power, but a shift needs to be made to allow the public to recognise their own power to influence authorities. This is related to perceptions of power dynamics.
- The setting of citizens' expectations of accountability processes and outcomes is also a concern. Unachievable expectations from citizens might be contributing to unsatisfactory outcomes. Expectation management could be supported by more collaborative accountability and increased transparency of processes. This is explored further in theme 14.

Theme 3 Opportunities

Transparent processes

There is an opportunity to make behind-the-scenes processes clear to the public: to allow individuals to understand expected accountability journeys before making an inquiry, and to be updated on the journey they're on throughout the process of making an enquiry.

By being clear about the expectations of processes and service delivery standards, public bodies could support individuals to identify when standards have or have not been met.

Resources and considerations

- Many processes and delivery standards already exist across public bodies and services. More investigation is required to identify why these are not already being met consistently.

Transparency around restricted information

Sometimes there are justifiable reasons for an organisation not to share all the information about a particular incident. However, organisations should seek to be transparent around the reasons for this. This helps to build trust and understanding with the public. Consistent and frequent communication also plays a key role in this.

Resources and considerations

- What can organisations learn from sectors where this is quite a normal processes, such as in the case of prosecutions?

Theme 4

I wasn't aware of anyone being held to account for the situation

...so I had no confidence that anything had changed.

Context

People felt that it was too easy for services, and for those who run them, to avoid responsibility for failings due to a lack of scrutiny or consequences.

Generally, people wanted accountability to be focused on finding and implementing solutions, but when services failed to engage with this, they believed that there had been no consequences.

People wanted public service providers to follow their own accountability processes and standards. They wanted to see that there were consequences or action was taken, as well as to understand what the next steps were, and the impact these had on the service.

“Satisfactory compensation or action should be undertaken by the service.”

“I want an opportunity to have updates from public bodies or services afterwards to understand subsequent change.”

User needs

- I need to know who has ultimate responsibility for this issue so that I can hold them to account.
- I need to know what I can expect the outcomes of my enquiry to be so that I can hold the service to account.
- I need the culture of the service to encourage internal reflection so that it can continue to improve.

Constraints

- Consequences depend on how someone engages with the complaints process and which level they escalate it to. Complaints that go to the ombudsman (SPSO) are translated into recommendations and investigated. Public bodies are encouraged to take responsibility for their own complaints

before issues are escalated, but evidence is required to make significant changes, such as retraining staff.

- 'Saving face' prevents public bodies from reflection. Senior positions experience pressures that make it difficult to admit wrongdoing to the public.

Theme 4 Opportunity

Constructive and participatory accountability

There is an opportunity to shift perspectives towards viewing accountability and public scrutiny as constructive data. Currently, public bodies and services often lack transparency due to fears of publicly admitting failure of delivery. However, research has shown that the public would gain trust in services if failures were transparent and constructive actions were considered and publicised.

This shift in culture might reframe adversarial processes as learning processes, and encourage services to welcome accountability as an opportunity to learn and grow. Changing the narrative of accountability, from an act of seeking consequences or punishment to a process of participatory improvement, would be more aligned to the attitudes of the public.

Resources and considerations

- Public bodies and services will require extra support to accept transparency of failure as an accountability measure that is worth the associated risk of public scrutiny.
- To be able to view public feedback as constructive data, public bodies and services need to be offered capacity and empowerment to implement change.
- Expectations need to be set around what a reasonable or desired course of action might be; whether that is a simple apology or training in the case of a mistake being made, a deeper investigation of the systems surrounding the service, or a redesign of the service to better meet the public need.

Disempowerment of Service Users and Staff

Theme 5

I wasn't supported to participate in accountability

...so I kept it to myself and I lost trust in the service.

Context

When accountability measures were baked into public services, users were provided with more guidance for accessing accountability.

When service standards were clear and accessible, users were better able to identify when something had gone wrong and when to speak up or take action.

People were more likely to access accountability when the service prompted them for feedback and opinions, for example, when asked by phone operators and website surveys: "how was this service for you?". This was often demonstrated by private sector services that recognised prompts as opportunities to collect data that went towards improving customer service.

User needs

- I need the service to ask me for feedback before an issue even arises so that the service can maintain high standards.
- I need the service to be able to admit to failures and learn from mistakes so that it can continue to improve.

Constraints

- Public bodies and services might be lowering access to accountability processes to avoid dealing with high volumes of requests and public scrutiny.

Theme 5 Opportunities

Constructive accountability

There is an opportunity to develop inbuilt accountability measures within public services and bodies. These might include making service standards clear and accessible so that users know what to expect and can easily identify when something has gone wrong.

Prompts might be integrated within public service delivery to collect user feedback and direct individuals towards accountability processes where appropriate.

Resources and considerations

- A wider cultural shift is required to support public bodies to proactively invite accountability, instead of remaining reactive to public enquiry.

Capacity to seek intentional accountability

We need to build in rhythms and rituals that allow service providers to prompt service users to seek accountability - from a simple, “how was the service today”, to occasional signposting to accountability services.

In doing so, we also need to remove ‘dark patterns’ that exist: built-in service engagements that are sometimes intentional blockers to seeking accountability, such as direct contact details being hidden several layers down in the architecture of a website.

By building opportunities for continual reflection into everyday practices, we can normalise this reflective approach and lower the barriers to seeking accountability when it matters.

Resources and considerations

- There is a certain amount of ‘feedback fatigue’. These measures need to go beyond simply asking people to rate their experiences.
- If services do prompt users for feedback, then more capacity is required to translate this into action.

Theme 6

I didn’t feel the consultation was worthwhile or took my views into account
...so I lost trust in the service and in consultations more widely

Context

Especially in rural places, poor experiences of community consultations had led to widespread disengagement from opportunities to hold public bodies to account. Many people believed that consultations were simply tokenistic.

Consultations often “informed the public instead of involving them in local decision making”, and only involved the public after a decision had already been made. During the consultations, activities were often poorly facilitated, which made for a negative experience overall.

Afterwards, residents were not informed of how their input had made an impact or affected local decision making. Mostly, they did not see any results within their communities after their involvement. All of this made people feel as if they were participating in ‘tick-box activities’, which was frustrating and felt like a waste of their time.

Consultation processes and standards were recognised as wider issues across Scotland, having a large impact on access to accountability. Outlined in theme 1, proactive publication and transparency of decision making can reduce the need for tokenistic consultation by allowing the public to understand fixed decisions.

User needs

- I need the service to actively seek my views so that the final solution is designed with the full picture in mind.
- I need the staff who are delivering consultations to be invested in them and to be well trained so that I can feel confident that my input will have impact.
- I need to be involved in the conversation early so that my views can have a meaningful impact on the final outcome.
- I need to be informed about how and why my views have or have not contributed to the final solution.
- I need to be involved in the ongoing conversation so that I can understand why some of my demands might not be met and contribute to ideas for compromise.

Constraints

- Public engagement resources are very limited. It tends to be a role that is added to someone's job description, rather than their core function or expertise.
- There is a lack of training and confidence within staff delivering consultation, who view consultations as requirements rather than active opportunities for increased understanding and service improvement.

Theme 6 Opportunities

Proactive publication

Good consultation requires follow-up with participants to inform them of the impact of their involvement. Participants need to understand how their views are used, and if they do not contribute towards outcomes, then they need to understand why.

There is an opportunity for Scotland to formalise its consultation practices and by supporting the training and use of skilled facilitators. This could be done by consolidating resources across national organisations to form a central consultation body, or by using independent actors through contracting.

Resources and considerations

- Many participation and consultation standards exist in Scotland. More investigation is required to understand what needs to be done to ensure they are implemented consistently, and if they should be altered to meet public needs.
- Cost is a consideration in relation to the training and use of skilled facilitators in Scotland.

Consultation beyond consultation

Consultations have their place, but are also limited. Even when done well, consultations do not reach representative samples of the public. There is an

opportunity to view consultation as a crucial part of the decision making process, rather than a 'tick box' exercise to meet engagement standards.

Consultation as a central part of decision making would need to genuinely collaborate with the public to seek consensus and co-create solutions. To seek equal access to participation, formats would be required to involve more than just questionnaires and workshops, which are not accessible to everyone.

Resources and considerations

- Constructive consultation and the genuine involvement of the public in decision making and solution development requires more funding and public service capacity across Scotland.

Theme 7

I didn't want to make a fuss

...so the service was never able to improve.

Context

Where there are limited options for public services, especially in rural areas, people were less likely to make a complaint or seek accountability, for example:

- If only one service option is present (e.g. one school), residents are less likely to recognise what a good or bad service experience looks like due to lack of comparison. People are less likely to complain about it because they feel resigned to the way things are.
- When one public body is the main source of employment in an area, people are less likely to hold it to account because they are dependent and loyal.
- People are more afraid of repercussions when complaining if they personally know service delivery staff in their area.
- People are less likely to find unbiased representatives for cases, panels and hearings, and fear repercussions if they are repeat complainers or have long-standing issues.

User needs

- I need to be encouraged to speak up so that I can see that my view has value.
- I need to see examples of action taken when other people speak up so that I see that my view has value.
- I need to feel confident that speaking up will not have negative repercussions for me or those around me.
- I need to be given the confidence that I deserve to receive a good service so that there can be equality across the board.
- I need there to be an easy process to speak up (regardless of the 'depth' of my enquiry) so that I can gain confidence in having my voice heard and seek accountability again in the future.

Theme 7 Opportunities

Normalising accountability

Many people do not consider accountability because they do not want to 'make a fuss' or be viewed as a complainer or disrupter.

By making the seeking of accountability feel like an inherent and everyday part of service engagement, we can normalise the behaviours around it and empower more people to participate.

If the public can see that the views of others like themselves have been considered and acted upon, then they are more likely to view their own voices as having value.

Resources and considerations

- More visibility and active prompting from services is required to begin normalising accountability and lower the barriers to access.

Reducing fear of repercussions

When seeking accountability within an organisation that you rely upon, and where the accountability procedure is not independent from the organisation, people often fear that they will be punished, or that an essential service will be denied to them for speaking up. Bodies such as the ombudsman or an independent complaints service can help people feel safer when seeking accountability.

Additionally, if staff are empowered to view themselves as working with the public, rather than for their organisation, then it would be easier to frame accountability as a learning opportunity over an act of seeking consequence.

Resources and considerations

- Services and bodies would be required to invest in a mindset that prioritises constructive relationships with the public over defensive ones.

Theme 8

I didn't say anything because it hadn't worked in the past

...so service changes never take my voice, or others like mine into account.

Context

Many people described negative past experiences of accountability processes as their reason for not considering participation again: "Nothing happened, so why would I try it again?".

Their past experiences of accountability had often been extremely emotional and time consuming, especially when in relation to health and social care issues, and

had resulted in no change to their circumstances: “It was a battle and it ruined my life for a whole year. It was a total waste of time”.

General feelings of injustice, ineffectiveness, and the time consuming conditions of accountability in relation to past experiences, contributed to a distrust of accountability in Scotland.

User needs

- I need my enquiries to be acknowledged and action taken so that I don't lose confidence in accountability processes.
- I need to see examples of action taken when other people speak up so that I see that my view will be heard.

Constraints

- How might we create consultation models that are empowering?
- How might we ensure that all accountability processes empower people to access accountability again, even when their ideal outcomes are not met?
- How might we prevent the public from becoming disengaged because of past experiences?

Theme 8 Opportunities

Active and early listening

There is an opportunity for services, particularly in health and social care, to start engaging with service users' issues preemptively, before they become complex, long-term cases: "we need to start engaging earlier, listening to people more, giving them choices".

By being transparent about back-end processes during accountability enquiries, services and bodies could help the public recognise that their issues are being processes in between engagements. By better demonstrating to service users that their enquiries have been understood, services might support public confidence in accountability: "sometimes services listen but people perceive that they don't listen".

Proactive publication for public confidence

There is an opportunity to use the proactive publication of positive outcomes from accountability processes, examples of what to do when positive outcomes are not met, and better access to advocacy to build public confidence.

By demonstrating to the public that accountability processes can be worthwhile, and by providing better access to support services, general public confidence could be developed.

Resources and considerations

- Proactive publication at a national level might best support a confidence-building narrative of accountability in Scotland.

A Lack of Accessibility

Theme 9

I wasn't able to advocate for myself

...so I didn't access the accountability I was entitled to.

Context

People have more confidence to continue with accountability processes when they have access to advocacy or support groups, but this is not offered to everyone. Advocacy is not only about supporting vulnerable groups; it is a means by which otherwise unheard voices can address the issues that affect them.

Community councils in rural areas often provide unofficial advocacy and support to local residents when navigating accountability processes. It is unclear to the public what support is available to those who do not engage with community councils. People with long-standing issues often join voluntary groups or boards to find allies and elevate their issues, especially carers. In effect, developing their own advocacy and support networks where they find this lacking. However, most people are not offered advocacy or support services at all.

User needs

- I need to be able to access accountability without having to be an expert.
- I need to have access to unbiased advocacy at all stages of the process.

Constraints

- The emphasis is usually on the individual to seek advocacy.
- You can become vulnerable at the point of making a complaint, or at different stages along the accountability process; advocacy should not be considered for categorised 'vulnerable groups' only.
- While the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and other organisations do provide national support and advocacy, the public were unable to access this consistently and equitably, which requires further investigation to understand the barriers.

Theme 9 Opportunities

Consistent and equal advocacy

There is a need to offer advocacy and support services that help navigate accountability processes to everyone, and at all stages of public service use.

Further investigation is required to identify how public bodies might provide information and access to advocacy services for everyone.

Resources and considerations

- Advocacy must be independent, but these services exist in private and third sectors, which makes it harder for public bodies to build relationships with them and offer advocacy pathways for service users.

Support expansion and access to national advocacy

Currently, to support their independence from public bodies, advocacy services are not nationalised, instead being managed within private and third sectors. However, this leaves them unregulated and inconsistent across different regions of the country.

It was suggested that the benefits of a national advocacy model should be investigated. It might be more practical to consider what advocacy services exist already in Scotland, such as through CAB, and provide support to expand these and increase consistent access.

Resources and considerations

- Some stakeholders believe that a mixed market is the best model for national advocacy services, while others suggest that collective national advocacy requires investment.

Theme 10

I wasn't able to speak to someone who could help

...so I was left feeling that the service didn't care.

Context

People had more confidence to continue with accountability processes when they believed they had access to the right person with specific expertise.

The first point of contact is often someone who deals with requests but has no expertise or authority within the service, which can frustrate users: "I was frustrated because I felt like I was dealing with someone who couldn't make decisions".

These first points of contact often felt defensive instead of supportive of the claim, for example staff members who commented that "our workers would never do that".

User needs

- I need the experience of making first contact to be consistent, regardless of who that person is.
- I need to work with someone who has the power to make decisions or take action.
- I need to feel as though the people I am in contact with are on my side and not defensive or against me.
- I need all routes into accountability to point me in the right direction.

Constraints

- The needs of service users and their desired experiences for accountability have to be balanced with what is realistic and achievable.
- One person won't have all of the information, so you might need to speak to several people with various expertise.
- Some community councils believe that public bodies are struggling to provide satisfactory engagement due to stretched resources.

Theme 10 Opportunity

Active listening

Often people dealing with accountability inquiries at the first point of contact are not trained to assess the situation in a person-centred way, and default to existing generic process options over addressing the individual needs of the person.

It was suggested that service delivery staff should be trained, supported, and offered capacity to engage in active listening with service users. It is thought that empowerment for service staff to engage in active listening to address individual user needs would contribute towards a shift in culture: from process-centred to person-centred delivery.

Resources and considerations

- Currently, person-centred approaches and active listening to assess and address individual user needs is viewed as a drain on resources. However, many senior stakeholders believed that a commitment to 'getting it right first time' would support efficiency of service delivery.
- It was noted that active listening activities would still require structure, since processes are viewed as a staff resource, to make jobs easier and maintain consistency.

Theme 11

I couldn't communicate with the service in a way that worked for me

...so I fell out of the process.

Context

Different people require different modes of communication, and at different stages. Various options are required to meet everyone's individual needs. Some examples include:

- Face-to-face meetings are required to provide dialogue and human engagement, especially when issues are complex and personal.
- Some people find live conversations intimidating and need time and support to verbalise their concerns, often preferring to document their cases in writing.

- Phone calls and emails provide a good initial contact to access accountability informally and quickly, for example when a care worker misses an appointment.
- Paper correspondence is required to provide evidence and ‘paper trails’ of engagements to support accountability during longer processes.

User needs

- I need dialogue and human engagement to discuss issues when they are complex and personal.
- I need to have the option to document my case in writing to avoid intimidating conversations.
- I need to have the option to speak to someone directly via phone to address urgent issues quickly and informally.
- I need to be given options and support to verbalise my concerns.
- I need written correspondence throughout to provide a paper trail of evidence.

Constraints

- Services have to take care to balance reasonable adjustments with capacity to deliver.
- Public bodies have duties under the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure accessibility. These bodies need to ensure that they can meet these obligations, and support should be in place to help them achieve this.
- Formal written correspondence is often used to slow down processes to meet demand.

Theme 11 Opportunities

Communication Needs Assessments

Public service engagement and accountability processes often prescribe the modes of communication that will be used, for example phone calls or written letters.

It is believed that the individual communication needs of service users should be assessed from the first point of contact, to ensure they are supported throughout the process: “No-one is asking ‘what are the needs at this stage’, instead they’re asking ‘what processes are available’”.

Resources and Considerations

- The Equalities Act 2010 already sets out a requirement to ensure that everyone is able to engage equally with services, and that they should automatically identify the support that is needed to facilitate engagement.

Cultures of Accessibility

Public bodies often view accessibility needs of service users as a cost to delivery in relation to spending and resource allocation. A framework to support a person-centred approach could be used to support a culture shift within public service accountability in Scotland.

Resources and Considerations

- Person-centred approaches exist throughout health and social care and might be viewed as case studies. The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework is an example of a person-centred approach for supporting children and young people in Scotland.

Theme 12

I wanted us to work together, but I felt like the opposition

...so it was an unpleasant experience with an unsatisfactory outcome.

Context

Generally, the public used accountability processes with the intent to improve public services. They wanted to reach a solution with the service, but were often met with an 'us versus them' attitude.

The public wanted accountability processes to feel "hopeful, not fearful", and wanted public services to view their feedback as constructive and useful, instead of an "inconvenience to business as usual". Instead, they believed that throughout accountability processes, public bodies should seek to provide "satisfaction on both sides, creating positive relationships where both have benefitted from a complaint".

People who had negative public service experiences were mostly understanding of the pressures on service delivery staff, and considered wider processes and limited resources to be the reason for inaction.

User needs

- I need the service to want to work with me openly so that we can find a resolution through dialogue.
- I need accountability processes to feel hopeful so that I stay positive.
- I need services to view my feedback as constructive, not inconvenient, so that we can make services better for everyone.
- I need services to genuinely value my feedback so that I feel listened to.

Constraints

- Within public bodies, there is apprehension towards decision making due to potential reputation damage. Once a path has been chosen for a decision, there is a fear of going back to review or alter it, which makes dialogue difficult
- Service delivery staff also benefit from a 'we' mentality. Staff are empowered when they can be more inclusive and provide their own voices within the services they provide.

Theme 12 Opportunities

Valuing public input

The 'us versus them' perspective of public bodies is understood to be a product of internal cultures. There is an opportunity to work towards a culture that considers the input of the public as valuable and necessary to continuously improve public service design and delivery. By empowering the public and service delivery staff to work together by engaging in activities such as active listening, a culture that values public input could be developed.

Resources and considerations

- Resources are required to provide service delivery staff with the training, support and capacity to engage in active listening and dialogue with the public.
- However, investing in services that value and respond to public feedback is viewed by some senior stakeholders as a longer-term opportunity to improve efficiency.
- Private services, such as telecommunications, are seen to value customer input throughout service engagement. Private sector examples could be studied and their engagement methods replicated.

People-centred over process-centred approaches

There is a clear opportunity to develop people-centred over process-centred approaches within accountability in Scotland.

Resources and considerations

- Other people-centred approaches exist within public sectors across Scotland and can be studied as case studies, such as GIRFEC.
- The Scottish Human Rights Commission is committed to taking a human-rights based approach within Scotland, using the Panel framework (Participation, Accountability, Non-Discrimination and Equality, Empowerment, Legality).

Theme 13

I wasn't involved in finding a solution

...so I didn't feel that the outcome was satisfactory.

Context

To differing degrees, people wanted to be involved in the creation of a solution and offered the opportunity to participate in accountability processes.

People wanted to be treated as the experts of their own cases and experiences, and

for their inputs to be genuinely valued towards a commitment for improvement: “We need two-way communication to reach a solution”.

User needs

- I need to be treated as the expert of my case so that I feel valued and listened to.
- I need to be involved in the creation of a solution so that my input contributes towards better service outcomes.
- I need to know that my feedback was considered unbiasedly so that the process feels of value.

Constraints

- Practically, public services might struggle to resource collaborative solution finding.

Theme 13 Opportunity

Implementing participation standards

There is an opportunity to support public bodies to see people as active partners instead of passive users within their services.

Public services need additional support, training and capacity to be able to involve communities in the co-creation of solutions.

Resources and considerations

- Many standards and policies already exist to support public participation within the development of services, such as the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. However, these are believed to be poorly and inconsistently implemented across Scotland. More work is required to understand why services struggle to implement these standards, and what needs to be done to improve upon this.
- Deliberative engagement models are already being utilised in Scotland to support extended public participation, for example within the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland.

Theme 14

I felt there was no satisfactory outcome

...so I felt disempowered and disengaged.

Context

The research told us that people needed to leave accountability processes feeling empowered to increase their chances of engaging again in the future.

Most people wanted assurance that their involvement in accountability would make a difference. The assumption that no change would come as a result of their participation was common, and this put people off engaging with accountability in the future.

If the process does not end with identifiable actions and changes, then people generally feel disempowered and were less likely to seek accountability in the future: “reporting and actions are where satisfaction comes from in complaining. I don’t know if the staff were spoken to”.

People wanted the process to have a clear end with a positive outcome: “I need the end of the process to feel personal”. Small gestures made a big difference in how people felt about the experience, for example when asked “Is there anything else I can help you with?”

User needs

- I need to know that my involvement made a difference, to feel as though it was worthwhile.
- I need to know what outcomes were reached, and why, so that I understand how my input was used. Or if changes are unable to be made, then why this is the case.
- I need the end of the process to feel positive and personal so that I feel empowered

Constraints

- While private sector organisations rely on customer satisfaction because of competition in the market, public services often do not have to compete for their customers as they may be the only option.
- Citizens’ unachievable expectations of accountability processes and outcomes might be contributing to feelings of unsatisfactory outcomes. With reference to theme 3, expectation management could be supported by more collaborative accountability and increased transparency of processes.

Theme 14 Opportunity

Developing end criteria

There is an opportunity for criteria to be developed that would determine the acceptable conditions to end an accountability journey.

End criteria would need to support active listening and dialogue to ensure users feel “listened to and not just heard”, and empower them to take part in accountability processes again, even when their preferred outcome is not reached.

Resources and considerations

- Private sector services were viewed as providing good examples of end criteria, for example repeating the customer's points to ensure they had been interpreted correctly, and waiting for them to hang up first.

Theme 15

I had different experiences of dealing with elected and non-elected officials

...so I lost trust in their representation.

Context

People felt there was a disparity in dealing with elected and non-elected officials.

In general, people felt they were more likely to receive a response from elected officials. However they also believed that elected representatives from different parties struggled to work with each other within local authorities, which increased frustrations with public service decisions at a local authority level.

People were often untrusting of non-elected representatives, and sometimes attributed a lack of transparency of public spending and decision making to their positions. A lack of accountability was associated with non-elected officials in these circumstances.

No accountability-specific opportunities are related to this issue. It is believed that a general increase in transparency of local decision making is required.

User needs

- I need to know that elected and non-elected officials are working together so that I can trust their processes.
- I need to know that non-elected representatives don't have hidden agendas so that I can trust their decision making.
- I need to have consistent representation from officials so that I can feel adequately represented.

Constraints

- The expectations of what MSPs and non-elected officials can do for residents should be better managed.
- The public often call upon elected and non-elected officials and MSPs to appeal decisions that have been made, or to escalate an issue when an accountability process has been unsatisfactory. However, this should be seen as a last resort and should not take focus away from unsatisfactory complaints procedures.

Theme 16

I lost trust in the service

...so I needed the service to rebuild my trust.

Context

People who access accountability processes have often done so following a loss of trust in a public service or body. Accountability then becomes an opportunity to rebuild that trust with the service user.

At the end of every engagement, people want the service to show that it has understood them and cares about the issue.

A lack of trust in a service or body also contributes to a lack of trust in accountability processes. People want “to have peace of mind and trust that the right process is being followed”, but find this difficult to believe when their trust has already been lost.

User needs

- I need services to show me that they have understood me so that I feel genuinely listened to, not just heard.
- I need services to show me that they are following their own processes and standards, so that I believe that they are doing what they promise to do.

Constraints

- Accountability needs to be viewed as a learning process for public bodies and services, not as an inconvenience. We need to change the culture around this.
- Trust is a crucial aspect to perceptions of public bodies, and the importance of training for staff should not be underestimated.

Theme 16 Opportunity

Openness and transparency

Qualities of openness and transparency were identified as prerequisites to relationships of trust between people and public services and bodies.

There is an opportunity for public bodies to use transparency of decision making and processes to support trusting relationships and inbuilt accountability.

Resources and considerations

- Public bodies often view transparency as a risk to their reputation, with scrutiny increasing their perceived vulnerability. However, the public have identified a need to understand back-end processes to be able to trust public decision making, even when they disagree with the outcomes.

Recommendations

In response to the findings from this report, three recommendations have been proposed, each one producing outcomes and findings that inform the next. As such, it is suggested that they be undertaken in concurrence. Recommendation 1a and 1b are an integrated workstream that would support the foundation of a Community of Practice and further findings to undertake recommendation 2.

Recommendation 1a and 1b could be undertaken before the end of this National Action Plan cycle, while also using this time to set up the inputs for recommendation 2, which could be undertaken during the next National Action Plan cycle.

Workstream	Inputs	Outputs
<p>Recommendation 1a</p> <p>Investigating the barriers and opportunities to support access to accountability within service delivery, with a focus on practical 'on the ground' staff needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report) • A foundational understanding of existing standards, guidance and policies, and their influence on accountability • A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability • Identification of the barriers to providing consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level • An understanding of the standards, guidance, and policies that already exist within Scotland to support access to accountability • Opportunities to support operational staff and service delivery to improve consistent access to accountability.
<p>Recommendation 1b</p> <p>A review of current solutions and examples of good practice that support access to accountability in Scotland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability (from recommendation 1a) • The barriers to provide consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level (from recommendation 1a) • The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report) • A foundational understanding of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams that support access to accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams in Scotland that support access to accountability • Opportunities to apply these learnings to meet the needs of operational service delivery staff to support access to accountability.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland. 	
<p>Recommendation 2</p> <p>Establish a Community of Practice and a People's Panel to develop pilot 'tests of change'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report) • The needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability (from recommendation 1a) • The barriers to provide consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level (from recommendation 1a) • A review of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams in Scotland that support access to accountability (from recommendation 1b) • Opportunities to apply these learnings to meet the needs of operational service delivery staff to support access to accountability (from recommendation 1b) • A foundational understanding of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams that support access to accountability • A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining knowledge of existing standards and guidance, and examples of best practice, to address the barriers and opportunities from this research • Form a representative People's Panel and Community of Practice group to iterate and develop 'tests of change' • Longer term commitment from the Community of Practice to support continuous learning and development, and sustainable consistent change • Strengthening the foundation of democracy at a time of crisis and unrest.

Recommendation 1a

Investigating the barriers and opportunities to support access to accountability within service delivery, with a focus on practical ‘on the ground’ staff needs.

Throughout the majority of themes outlined in this report, standards, guidelines, and policies that respond to the identified issues relating to accountability have already been developed by the Scottish Government. For example, the PANEL framework developed by Scottish Human Rights Commission to embed citizen rights within service delivery, various participation standards that support active public involvement in decision making and public service development, and national advocacy services from CAB.

However, these standards and policies are not being implemented consistently across the country, and access to accountability processes remains dependant on the practices of ‘on the ground’ service delivery staff. More work is required to understand the barriers that staff face in supporting citizens to access accountability and delivering accountability processes that meet public needs.

Using the citizen needs outlined in this report, recommendation 1a proposes a small piece of further work to understand the ‘behind the scenes’ story of service delivery, viewing staff as service users too. By understanding the barriers that operational staff face, opportunities will be identified to enhance access to accountability through the utilisation of existing resources, standards and policies.

Outputs and Outcomes

- Identification of the needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability
- Identification of the barriers to providing consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level
- An understanding of the standards, guidance, and policies that already exist within Scotland to support access to accountability
- Opportunities to support operational staff and service delivery to improve consistent access to accountability.

Inputs and Assets

- The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report)
- A foundational understanding of existing standards, guidance and policies, and their influence on accountability
- A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland.

Recommendation 1b

A review of current solutions and examples of good practice that support access to accountability in Scotland.

Examples of best practice and local solutions to accountability access exist within specific sectors, public bodies and services, and areas across the country. By taking an asset-based approach to solution development, existing pockets of success in Scotland could be translated into case studies to support national learning and development in relation to accountability.

The investigation could form a service delivery-focused **'accountability landscape review'** that would assess current mechanisms, resources, and workstreams, and align them to the findings from citizen engagement (this report) and recommendation 1a.

Many workstreams and resources already support access to accountability, however these are not always signposted or made accessible to the public, for example national advocacy services. Understanding and supporting the success of what already exists, such as Extra Help Unit (EHU) models, should be a focus of work going forwards. This piece of work would review the qualities of successful examples and apply these learnings to the barriers that operational service delivery staff face (identified in recommendation 1a). This would allow the Scottish Government to gain an asset-based understanding of the opportunities to support access to accountability without taking a 'lift and shift' approach, which would not address regional and contextual barriers and needs.

The workstreams of parallel commitments should also be considered to identify opportunities for shared learning, especially in relation to participation frameworks for decision-making. This piece of work could be undertaken in concurrence with recommendation 1a.

Outputs and Outcomes

- A review of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams in Scotland that support access to accountability
- Opportunities to apply these learnings to meet the needs of operational service delivery staff to support access to accountability.

Inputs and Assets

- The needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability (from recommendation 1a)
- The barriers to provide consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level (from recommendation 1a)
- The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report)
- A foundational understanding of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams that support access to accountability
- A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland.

Recommendation 2

Establish a Community of Practice and a People's Panel to develop pilot 'tests of change'.

The establishment of a People's Panel was an intended outcome of this project, however, due to the constraints of Covid-19 this could not be developed. Snook would encourage the Open Government Partnership to invest in a People's Panel when possible. Many participants from the public engagement phase of the project expressed commitment to continue their involvement in the development of pilot solutions and were able to contribute digitally and remotely. Due to the distributed nature of participants, conducting a digital People's Panel has the potential to improve accessibility and representation, and reduce costs.

The formation of a complimentary Community of Practice could bring together representatives from the public sector, including policy makers, to allow the future development of solutions to be equally represented by the public and public bodies that have the power to implement change. By supporting stakeholders from all aspects of accountability to engage with the public and participate in solution finding, more trust might be generated, and wider public confidence built. Public Panel and Community of Practice models provide an opportunity for the Open Government Partnership to commit to longer term, continuous learning and development.

Using findings from the investigations outlined in Recommendations 1a and 1b, a People's Panel and a Community of Practice could be supported to co-create potential solutions using case study solutions and examples of existing resources, policies, and standards. By focusing this 'test group' around the themes of this research and existing resources, a more holistic and efficient approach might be taken towards improving access to accountability for everyone in Scotland. The Community of Practice would be recruited during recommendations 1a and 1b.

Participatory methods, such as deliberative engagement, active listening, and representative sampling, are recommended for use within this model.

Outputs and Outcomes

- Combining knowledge of existing standards and guidance, and examples of best practice, to address the barriers and opportunities from this research
- Form a representative People's Panel and Community of Practice group to iterate and develop 'tests of change'
- Longer term commitment from the Community of Practice to support continuous learning and development, and sustainable consistent change
- Strengthening the foundation of democracy at a time of crisis and unrest.

Inputs and Assets

- The needs of citizens in the context of access to accountability (from this report)
- The needs of operational service staff to support citizen access to accountability (from recommendation 1a)
- The barriers to provide consistent access to accountability at a service delivery level (from recommendation 1a)

- A review of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams in Scotland that support access to accountability (from recommendation 1b)
- Opportunities to apply these learnings to meet the needs of operational service delivery staff to support access to accountability (from recommendation 1b)
- A foundational understanding of best practice examples, existing mechanisms, resources, and work streams that support access to accountability
- A strong network of committed stakeholders across the public sector in Scotland.

Appendix 1: Defining Accountability

‘Good Job’ Cards

During the initial interviews, residents expressed examples of ‘good jobs’ being achieved by public services and accountability processes.

The qualities of these ‘good jobs’ were translated into decks of ‘good job’ cards, which represented examples of good practice in relation to accountability. These were used during the national events to discuss definitions of accountability, and standards of best practice across journey stages of public service use and accountability. Each card has been outlined below:

The process

Before I started, it was clear what the process would involve and this was followed.

Dialogue

I was able to have a conversation about the issue; it wasn’t one-sided.

Clear and upfront information

The information was where I expected to find it. The information was easy to access and to understand.

No prior knowledge

I didn’t need to be an expert to make an enquiry. It was intuitive and straightforward.

Who to contact

It was clear who I should contact for help.

Expectations

When I first got in touch, you clearly explained the process and the expected timescales.

Acknowledgement

You let me know that you had received my enquiry promptly.

Single-channel

From start to finish, everything was handled in the same way (e.g. online, on the phone etc.)

One point of contact

The same person worked with me from start to finish and was my contact point throughout.

Kept in the loop

I knew what was happening with my enquiry at all times and I was reassured that I hadn’t been forgotten about.

Telling my story

I only had to tell my story once.

Encouragement

I was supported and encouraged to make my enquiry by the service or others.

Knowing my rights

I was reminded of my right to make an enquiry by the service.

Legal clarity

I had relevant laws or rules explained to me so that I could make my case.

Empathy

My complaint was handled with empathy and understanding. I knew I was being taken seriously.

Equality

I knew that I was treated the same as everyone else.

Safety

I felt safe; I wasn't afraid of consequences or repercussions.

Impact

I was informed of how my experience was used to make things better for others.

Work with me

You involved me in finding a solution.

Follow-up

You followed up with me afterwards to make sure that everything was ok.

Appendix 2: National Event Summaries

Dumfries

About

The first location was Dumfries at the Gracefield Arts Centre, on the 26th of February 2020.

Participants

The event gathered the opinions of 11 individuals from the area, over two sessions. Our morning session from 10:00 to 12:00 had 1 participant and our afternoon session from 14:00 to 16:00 gathered 10 participants.

Our participants ranged in age from 59 to 75 years old. All participant's apart from 1 attended as they were actively engaged in holding public services to account, whilst the other was interested in the topic.

All of the event attendees were retired with some of them working occasionally in different roles or volunteering.

Key themes

- Accountability and how it is enforced is important to the people in Dumfries as they felt it is currently not happening in their local council.
- Communication between the local council and the public was a recurring problem, with some attendees suspicious of things such as corruption.
- Understanding rights when it comes to holding public services to account.

Fort William

About

The second location was Fort William at An Drochaid, on the 27th of February 2020.

Participants

The event gathered the opinions of 9 individuals from the area. Two participants, both members of local community councils, attended our session from 10:00 to 12:00. In the afternoon we conducted interviews with 7 members of the public in the library, shops, cafes and a supermarket.

Our participants ranged in age from 28 to 80.

Key themes

- Residents in rural areas have a limited choice of service, which limits the ability to “vote with your feet”. There was a feeling that many people put-up with poor service, rather than seek accountability.
- A number of instances of a public body not responding to enquiries or appearing to ignore inputs from the public.
- Need to encourage government bodies to engage with the community
- People don't trust council, they feel disempowered.
- Acknowledgement that Public services have their own funding issues.

Dundee

About

The third location was Dundee at the Business Bakery, on the 4th of March 2020.

Participants

The event gathered the opinions of 8 individuals from the area, over two sessions. Six participants attended our morning session from 10:00 to 12:00 and a further 2 attended our afternoon session from 14:00 to 16:00.

Our participants ranged in age from 38 to 75 years old. All participants attended because they were actively engaged in holding public services to account.

Attendees included those in work, working parents and retired workers who had struggled to hold a public service to account and so had joined a board or group to do so.

Key themes

- Frustrated by the process, some people turn to joining groups and boards to better understand and influence the complaints procedure.
- Issues around complaints relating to healthcare in the area.
- The different methods participants are using to currently hold public services to account outside of the regular process.

Tarbert

About

The fourth location was Tarbert at the Templar Arts and Leisure Centre, on the 4th of March 2020.

Participants

The event gathered the opinions of 17 individuals from the area, over two sessions. Our morning session from 10:00 to 12:00 had 4 participants and our afternoon session from 14:00 to 16:00 gathered another 4 participants. The team were also able to conduct vox-pop interviews across the town and interviewed a further 9 people.

Our participant ranged in age from 21 to 70 years old.

Key themes

- There is no habit of 'complaining'. Access to public services in rural areas is limited. Without options to choose from, people prefer not to complain.

- There is an expectation of local authorities and public services that they should be open and transparent (accept when they have made a mistake).
- Dialogue and honesty are key.
- Poorly linked public transport and poor use of technologies are blocking access to opportunities to hold services to account
- People feel that they are ignored or locked out of opportunities to hold services to account

Alloa

About

The fifth location was Alloa, at Resonate Together, on the 9th of March 2020.

Participants

The event gathered the opinions of 10 individuals from the area, across two sessions. Our morning session from 10:00 to 12:00 had 6 participants and our afternoon session from 14:00 to 16:00 gathered 4 more individuals.

Key themes

- Accountability of public spending and decision making within local authorities
- Differing experiences of elected and unelected officials
- The role of community councils within rural areas
- Limited access to advocacy services



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This publication is available at www.gov.scot

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at
The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-063-2 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, September 2020

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS759226 (XX/20)

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