

Local  
Governance  
Review

# Democracy Matters

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Community-level decision-making: an analysis of responses to Democracy Matters

## Authors

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# Contents

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Executive Summary	4
Section 1 Introduction	12
Section 2 Who got involved in Democracy Matters?	17
Section 3 What are people's experiences of local decision-making?	22
Section 4 Do people want more control over decisions that affect their community?	28
Section 5 How do people describe their community: what does it mean to be 'local'?	33
Section 6 What forms of decision-making could be used at the community level?	35
Section 7 Other issues raised	41
ANNEX A	42

# Executive Summary

The Local Governance Review was jointly launched in December 2017 by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to consider how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government, and with communities. There are two strands to the Review:

- (1) community level decision-making; and
- (2) public service governance.

*Strand one* focuses on communities and has been called 'Democracy Matters' (abbreviated as DM). This report is an analysis of responses to the DM engagement.

## The Democracy Matters engagement

DM was designed to take a bottom-up approach to engaging people and communities. Scottish Government and COSLA worked in partnership with a group drawn from the community sector, equalities groups, the public and private sector to design the engagement process collaboratively. The group developed a short set of open questions designed to guide DM discussions, and a range of materials – designed to be as inclusive as possible – to support people to have discussions in their community.



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Your Community. Your Ideas. Your Future.

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There were five DM questions:

1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest?
2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?
3. When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?
4. Are there existing forms of decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?
5. Do you have any other comments, ideas or questions? Is there more you want to know?

People were able to get involved in a range of ways:

- **Organisational responses:** organisations submitted a range of views on community-level decision-making.
- **DM postcard:** it asked two of the DM questions and provided space to write a response and return by freepost.
- **An online forum:** people were able to contribute to an online dialogue about DM.

To mark the completion of this first phase of engagement, 13 regional events were organised across Scotland in November and December 2018.

## The analysis of responses to Democracy Matters

DM was designed to give communities flexibility and choice about how to run events and how to submit responses. As a result, the submissions do not follow a consistent format; they reflect a significant and varied body of material. A qualitative approach had to be used for analysing this material. The qualitative analysis presented in this report describes the spread and broad pattern of responses. It is not possible, or valid, to quantify the views and experiences described in submissions. The analysis presented reflects the perspectives of the individuals, communities and organisations that took part in DM; the analysis cannot be generalised to Scotland's population as a whole.

## Who got involved in Democracy Matters

There were 334 submissions which comprised:

- 127 submissions from community conversations. From the information provided, it is estimated that 2,967 people took part.
- 61 submissions from individuals: 23 by email, 117 by postcard, 21 online.
- 46 submissions from organisations. Some organisations used events to gather broader views to inform their submission. It is estimated this involved 885 people.

In addition, 226 people attended the regional events. Overall, it is estimated that 4,240 people took part in DM.

DM was designed to be as inclusive as possible so that communities of place and

communities of interest or identity were equally able to take part. It is evident from the submissions received that a very diverse cross-section of communities in Scotland chose to take part, described below.

Two fifths of the community conversations involved communities of place. The other three fifths involved communities of interest or identity; and three quarters of these reflected the experiences of communities of interest or identity in a specific locality. A number of submissions highlighted the importance of recognising the existence, and different needs, of 'communities within communities', particularly for groups reflecting protected characteristics.

Submissions came from a broad variety of communities of place. Events were held right across Scotland, in 29 of 32 local authority areas and representing the experiences of people living in cities, towns, neighbourhoods and villages.



Many different communities of interest or identity held community conversations and made submissions, from across four broad categories:

- **Identity:** people who identified as a community around shared language, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship status, and groups with shared experience around gender identity and sexuality.
- **Experience:** groups with shared experiences of poverty, homelessness, living on benefits, recovering from addiction, living with physical and mental health conditions, disabled people.
- **Lifestage:** groups with shared experience as young people, college and university students, parents, carers, and those who were retired.
- **Interests:** groups with a shared interest in the environment and sustainability, culture and the arts, growing your own food.

Most of the discussions held by communities of interest or identity reflected the experience of marginalised groups; some involved people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage or discrimination, often described as intersectionality.

The submissions describe a very broad range of experiences and views; different communities are starting from very different places in terms of their experiences of participating in local decision-making, and in their aspirations for greater involvement. The following describes the range of experiences.

## People's experiences of local decision-making

People described positive and negative experiences of their involvement in local decision-making. In a minority of cases, people had no experience of involvement in local decision-making. Responses describe the activity and energy of people getting involved in their communities across Scotland. However, the negative experiences of trying to be involved in decisions locally were more strongly and more frequently described.

The positive experiences ranged from taking part in, and helping to organise, activities and events in communities, to involvement with more formal community fora or organisations. The strength of community involvement and the positive impact of that involvement came through strongly in submissions. In broad terms, the submissions described three kinds of positive involvement:

- Political action and protesting
- Making their voices heard and influencing
- Being directly involved and taking decisions

The negative experiences from communities of place, and of interest or identity, covered a broad range:

- Poor communication
- Tokenistic engagement
- Lack of representation
- Inability to effect change/inaction
- Unwelcoming structures

There were a number of recurring themes about the kinds of barriers that prevent people from getting involved. These are summarised as:

- **Information:** Lack of information about how to be involved, what opportunities there are to participate in decisions; where and how decisions are taken. Information not reaching marginalised communities about services available to support inclusion.
- **Complexity:** The system is complicated – difficult to understand who is responsible for what, how things work and how to influence.
- **Accessibility:** Transportation is non-existent or poor – and expensive – in areas. Most formal decision-making fora meet during working hours; the time available to participate can be a factor. Physical accessibility a key issue for many disabled people.
- **Lack of support for engagement:** inadequate support for people to overcome range of practical barriers to involvement, and the range of barriers to inclusion experienced by marginalised and disadvantaged communities.
- **Style of participation:** The language and behaviours of public authorities and the ways in which forums and meetings are organised restrict or discourage participation.

## More community control over local decision-making

The clear evidence from the submissions is that people do want to have more control of decisions on issues that matter to them. This is particularly the case for control of decisions that are seen to directly affect communities, which should apply more locally. The vast majority of submissions expressed views that demonstrate a desire for a change to the status quo.

It was clear that what people understood by the term ‘control’ varied. Control was understood in terms of different kinds of participation in decision-making. For some, this was about being able to give their views as part of decisions being made, and for their input to lead to practical action that improved their community. Other submissions were clear it was about communities having the power and the resources to make decisions themselves. These views can be described broadly in terms of:

- **Influence** – having a voice in, and an impact on, decision-making.
- **Transparency and accountability** – public authorities being transparent about their decisions and communities being able to hold them to account for those decisions.
- **Authority** – having the authority and resources to take decisions.

There were some responses that described concerns; people who felt that control should not be devolved. For some, this was because of a worry about the responsibility involved; or a concern about, or a lack of confidence in, the capacity of communities to hold that responsibility. Some submissions expressed concern about how to respond to local demands, and being held accountable.

Across the responses as a whole, communities expressed an appetite and ambition for greater involvement in, or control of, decisions on nearly every policy issue for which public authorities have responsibility. In general, it could be seen that the issues identified largely reflected the lived experience and concerns of the specific community of place and/or community of interest or identity.

For some communities, their responses related to very specific issues and concerns that affected the quality of their daily lives for example, issues of disadvantage and discrimination, negative aspects of their local physical and social environment, the quality of their public housing, their access to and use of specific public services. For other communities, their responses spoke more about decisions that would benefit the wider community, meet community wishes and needs, support the social and physical regeneration of their local area.

Overall, communities identified a range of changes to how they are involved in decisions that affect their community:

- To be treated better by public authorities – through a change in culture and behaviour about involving communities in decisions.
- To be better connected – both within communities (pooling knowledge and resources); and with decision-makers.
- To be able to participate in decisions about their community; and, for some communities, that meant to have more local control over decisions, with the resources necessary for those decisions.
- For decisions that affect their community to be based on knowledge and experience, and for those decisions to lead to action that improves their lives.

## How do people describe their ‘local’ community

Many submissions described local in terms of a specific place, or geography, e.g. ‘my town’, ‘my village’, ‘the neighbourhood’. A distinction was often drawn between what were seen as the artificial boundaries around which different public services were organised, and what was described as ‘natural communities’ that made sense to people locally. Some described local in terms of size, or distance; others identified that communities can exist online.

Others identified that what was regarded as local for decision-making related to the specific issue. They identified that decisions might appropriately be taken at different geographic ‘levels’ (e.g. national/council area/community).

Many submissions associated the idea of 'local' more with social connections, and a shared sense of identity and belonging. Communities of interest/identity were likely to describe 'local' in similar terms, around shared experience and identity.

A few submissions suggested a specific definition of 'local' when thinking about community-level decision-making. For example, defined by an upper and lower limit on population size.

### Changes needed to enable decision-making at the community level

Across the broad sweep of responses, many existing forms of decision-making were identified that, with changes, might play a role in bringing communities closer to, or involved in local decision-making. Most often mentioned were community councils, but also community development trusts, community-based housing associations and forums/partnerships that brought together other local community organisations. There was a common view that any new arrangements should reflect local circumstances; that 'one size does not fit all'.

There were a range of views and experiences of community councils described in responses. Many views on community councils were supportive of, and ambitious for, their potential to take on more local powers, with changes. Others, fewer in number, held strongly negative views of community councils and did not think they should take on local decision-making.

They were regarded as unrepresentative, ineffective and reactive, self-interested and 'cliquey'.

Other examples of existing decision-making variously identified included: advisory groups, locality planning groups, community planning partnerships, school boards and parent councils, the Scottish rural and youth parliaments, participatory budgeting arrangements, local third sector organisations, other local community forums.

Responses also described a range of changes required to make community-level decision-making a reality covering the following themes:

- Supporting people to participate
- Building participation into the system
- Changing the culture and behaviours of public authorities towards community participation

People described a range of positive values they want to see expressed in the ways in which communities are enabled to participate by public authorities. These values describe:

- How public authorities should treat communities
- How communities and public authorities should work together
- New ways of working in partnership that deliver practical actions to improve outcomes for communities

Some community organisations, with experience of the current system of decision-making, described possible new structures for community decision-making. For some this was described as requiring a new tier of democracy; but others were explicitly opposed to such a development. Many identified that any power to take decisions required resources in order to deliver those decisions.

A few organisations provided worked up proposals of new forms of local decision-making at the community level and described how they could be constituted, their accountability, and how they could fit into the existing system of decision-making.

From the submissions, a range of measures can be identified that communities feel would help enable better community involvement in, or control over, decisions.

- Knowledge and education about people's rights and responsibilities as citizens, information about how (and which) public authorities take decisions that affect their communities, and information about how they can get involved in decisions.
- Practical training and organisational development for community groups and organisations to enable them to take on more responsibility.
- Greater influence over decisions made by public authorities and the means to hold those authorities better to account for those decisions.

- Community participation in/membership of existing decision-making institutions/structures (e.g. area communities, local community planning groups).
- New structures of community governance: either changing the functions and/authority of existing community organisations such as community councils, or development trusts, or community-run housing associations; or designing completely new structures at the community level.



# Section 1: Introduction

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The Local Governance Review was jointly launched in December 2017 by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) to consider how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government, and with communities.

There are two strands to the Review:

- (1) community level decision-making; and
- (2) public service governance.

*Strand one* focuses on communities and has been called ‘Democracy Matters’ (abbreviated subsequently in this report as DM). This report describes the analysis of responses to the DM engagement process, described below.

*Strand two* focuses on all public sector bodies, which were invited to offer proposals for improved governance arrangements at their level of place, based on an acceptance of increased variation in decision-making arrangements across Scotland. A report providing an analysis of the responses received to strand 2 has also been produced.

## The Democracy Matters engagement

DM was deliberately designed to take a bottom-up approach to engaging people and communities. Scottish Government and COSLA worked in partnership with a

group drawn from the community sector, equalities groups, the public and private sector to design the engagement process collaboratively. This group was called the ‘Enabling Group’ (Annex A for list of group members).

The Enabling Group developed a short set of five open questions designed to guide DM discussions:

1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest?
2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?
3. When thinking about decision-making, ‘local’ could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does ‘local’ mean to you and your community?
4. Are there existing forms of decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?
5. Do you have any other comments, ideas or questions? Is there more you want to know?

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A range of materials were produced by the Enabling Group to support people to host and organise discussions in their community in whatever way suited them best. They were designed to be as inclusive as possible. The materials included:

- A short animated film explaining the aims of DM
- A guide to the DM questions, which was also produced in an Easy Read version
- Information about how decisions about public services are taken in Scotland
- Guides to organising a DM event and to facilitating a good discussion. These guides made broad suggestions about things to consider in planning and running events; but did not set out a fixed format.

All of this material was made available on dedicated Local Governance Review webpages.

People were able to get involved in DM in a range of ways:

- **Community conversations:** Conversations were held in communities of geography or interest. In most cases, communities organised an event where people came together to have a conversation about the five DM questions. Communities chose to structure conversations in a variety of ways and used a range of supporting material. A report of the conversation was then submitted – in a variety of forms.
- **Individual responses:** people were able to submit their individual views by email or post. There was no required format for responses. Individuals gave their views in a variety of ways, some answered the DM questions directly and others responded more generally to the issues.
- **Organisational responses:** organisations submitted a range of views on community-level decision-making. There was no required format for responses. Some of the submissions from organisations responded to the DM questions directly and others responded more generally to the issues.
- **DM postcard:** a leaflet was developed to promote DM. It provided some information about the Local Governance Review and asked two of the questions. There was space to write a response to these questions and it could then be folded up into a pre-addressed ‘postcard’ format and returned by freepost. These were distributed at a range of events including the Scottish Government’s travelling Cabinet meetings, and by a range of organisations locally including councils, Community Planning Partnerships, Third Sector Interfaces, health, community and third sector organisations.
- **An online forum:** people were able to post ideas and responses to the DM questions, and respond to other contributions, in an online dialogue.

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To help support the community conversations, the Scottish Government made available a £30,000 fund for small grants to community organisations to cover expenses such as hiring a venue, providing refreshments and childcare costs. The fund was distributed by the Voluntary Action Fund which made grants for 89 community events, totalling £27,985.

In addition, the Scottish Government awarded larger grants totalling just under £20,000 to help ensure that DM was as inclusive as possible. These grants went to the following organisations who organised local events with specific marginalised groups:

- Church of Scotland (17 events)
- BEMIS (5 events)
- Deaf Scotland (2 events)



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DM was launched on 28 May 2018 and submissions could be made until the end of November. Submissions received after the deadline were also included.

To mark the completion of this first phase of engagement, a series of 13 regional events were organised by the Enabling Group. The events were held across Scotland in November and December 2018, in the early afternoon and early evening, in community venues in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Dundee, Glasgow, Inverness, Irvine and Oban.

Each event lasted two and a half hours and included a presentation which gave feedback on the emerging themes from provisional analysis of the initial responses received on DM. Table discussions were held, supported by a facilitator, focused on some of the aspects of community-level decision-making: specifically around local control, equalities and inclusion, and outcomes. Notes of the discussions were taken by facilitators and everyone attending was also encouraged to add their own written comments using post-it notes. This written material was included in the analysis undertaken for this report.

### The analysis of responses to Democracy Matters

For each submission to DM, respondents were asked to complete a Respondent Information Form. The information from the form was systematically recorded in a spreadsheet. This included information about

the method of engagement used, who the submission was from and the estimated numbers of people involved. This information was used to analyse who got involved in DM, and is described in the next section.

DM engagement was designed to give a high degree of flexibility and choice about how communities ran events and about how the discussions were then reflected in the written submissions. As a result, submissions did not follow a consistent structure or format. Taken as a whole, the submissions to DM reflect a significant and varied body of material. This means that a qualitative approach has to be used for analysing this material.

To support the qualitative analysis, the text of the submissions was uploaded into a qualitative analysis software package called NVivo. Using NVivo enabled the responses to be coded into thematic categories for analysis. A coding framework was developed from an initial analysis of responses and the responses then coded systematically using that framework. As a qualitative analysis, it seeks to describe the spread and broad pattern of responses. It is not possible, or valid, to quantify the views and experiences in submissions.

The analysis that is presented in the following sections reflects the views and experiences of individuals, communities and organisations that took part in DM, as they were reflected in the written submissions. In any public engagement exercise like

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DM, it is important to remember that the analysis cannot be generalised to Scotland's population as a whole.

### The structure of this report

The report is structured in the following sections which cover the DM process and each of the five questions:

1. Who got involved in Democracy Matters?
2. What are people's experiences of local decision-making?
3. Do people want more control over decisions that affect their community?
4. How do people describe their community: what does it mean to be 'local'?
5. What forms of decision-making could be used at the community level?
6. Other issues raised.



## Section 2: Who got involved in Democracy Matters?

This section provides more detail about who got involved in DM and how they participated.

There were 334 submissions on DM. They were made up of the following:

- There were 127 submissions from community conversations that reflected the results from 158 local events. From the information provided in submissions, it is estimated that 2,967 people took part.
- There were 161 submissions from individuals: 23 people responded by email, 117 sent in a postcard, 21 participated online.

- There were 46 submissions from organisations. A number of the organisations held discussion events/ conferences of varying size to gather broader views that informed their submission. From the information provided, it is estimated that this involved 885 people.

In addition, the 13 regional events held in November and December were attended by 226 people in total.

The table below summarises the numbers of people who got involved in DM: estimated to be 4,240 in total.

How people were involved	Submissions	Estimated no. of people engaged
Community conversation	127 submissions covering 158 local events	2,967
Individual response	23 submissions	23
Postcards	117 submissions	117
Online	21 people contributed to online discussions, making 133 comments in total	21
Organisational response	46 submissions	885 <sup>1</sup>
Regional events	13 events	226
<b>Total</b>		<b>4,240</b>

<sup>1</sup> Some of the responses from organisations reflected considerable levels of engagement with their membership, for example at conferences, other organisational events, or by convening a specific Democracy Matters discussion.

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DM was designed to be as inclusive as possible so that **communities of place** and **communities of interest or identity** would equally be able to take part. It is evident from the submissions received that a very diverse cross-section of communities in Scotland chose to take part, described below.

Three fifths of the 158 community conversations involved communities of interest and identity. The other two fifths of these conversations involved communities of place. Three quarters of the community conversations with communities of interest and identity reflected their experiences in a specific locality. A number of submissions highlighted the importance of recognising the existence, and different needs, of ‘communities within communities’, particularly for groups reflecting protected characteristics.

Submissions came from a very broad variety of **communities of place**. Events were held right across Scotland, in 29 of 32 local authority areas and representing the experiences of people living in cities, towns, neighbourhoods and villages.

Many different **communities of interest or identity** held community conversations and made submissions to DM. These communities can be described across four broad categories:

- **Identity:** this included people who identified as a community around a shared language, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship (e.g. EU citizens, refugees and asylum seekers, Syrian New Scots), around gender identity and sexuality.
- **Lifestage:** this included groups with shared experience as young people, college and university students, parents, carers, and those who were retired.
- **Experience:** this included groups coming together through shared experiences of poverty, homelessness, living on benefits, living with disability, recovering from addiction, living with physical and mental health conditions.
- **Interests:** this included groups with a shared interest in the environment and sustainability, culture and the arts, growing your own food.

A broad range of community groups and organisations, and some councils, supported or hosted community conversations, including local community groups and networks, community councils, community development trusts, housing associations, community interest companies, local faith organisations. This included organising conversations with some more marginal communities, who might not have otherwise participated in DM.

For example, a local Baptist church organised a number of conversations for different language groups, including Arabic, Urdu and French speakers. BEMIS worked with local community groups to organise a series of discussions around the country that involved

people from thirty different ethnic groups, nationalities and faith groups. BEMIS is a national member-led umbrella organisation that supports the development of the ethnic minority third sector across Scotland. A local community interest company concerned with inclusion organised a number of community conversations including one with people who have caring responsibilities and another with members of the Polish community in Glasgow.

Most of the discussions held by communities of interest or identity reflected the experience of marginalised groups. Some groups involved people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage or discrimination, described as intersectionality, for example, a group of Chinese women with autistic children.



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A broad range of **organisations** put in a submission including individual community councils and local networks of community councils, community development trusts, councils, local and national third sector organisations, national community organisations and associations, local and national equalities organisations and other national organisations including Common Weal and Electoral Reform Society and the Federation of Small Businesses.

The submissions describe a very broad range of experiences and views. It is clear that different communities are starting from very different places in terms of their experiences of participating in local decision-making, and in their aspirations for greater involvement. The following sections will describe the range of experiences.

## The experience of taking part in DM conversations

DM events were held in community spaces across Scotland and in one case through Twitter. Some groups used different ways to engage people and support the discussions; for example, using photographs as a way for people to express their responses to questions. Here is a picture from one of these events:

Submissions to DM illustrated and described communities engaged in discussions about how to have a greater stake and involvement in decisions that affect them. They described a strong sense of energy and enthusiasm in those discussions. For some of the people involved, taking part in discussions about the issues of DM was described as being an



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important and significant experience in itself. For some, it was an opportunity to join a debate about how to expand activity already happening in their community. For others, it was a new experience to consider their role as citizens and communities, and having that experience itself built their confidence and understanding. For some it encouraged them to think about how they could play a more active role and make a contribution.



**People often told us that they enjoyed the experience of coming together in their communities to discuss how decisions about their future should be taken.**

# Section 3: What are people's experiences of local decision-making?

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People described many different experiences of local decision-making, both positive and negative. In a minority of cases, people had no experience of involvement in decision-making. There were many positive experiences described. These were often accompanied by frustrations people had about the system and the difficulties in effecting change.

This section describes what people said in response to the DM question:

**Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest.**

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## Positive experiences of being involved

People described being active in their communities in many different ways. This ranged from taking part in social activities with their community to involvement with more formal community fora or organisations (e.g. community councils, development trusts, residents associations, parents councils).

The strength of community involvement and the impact of that involvement came through very strongly in submissions. The social connection and sense of shared purpose and identity that was associated with community activity, and the well-being that came from that, was frequently mentioned. The following provide examples of how this was expressed:

*“The youth forum provides a positive space to have your voice heard within the community. Being part of youth forum encourages you to be more confident and*

*it helps you feel valued within your local community.” (local youth forum)*

*“This group has influence in the community to help support women and their families.” (women’s group)*

The following gives a flavour of the many types of experiences people described through DM. In broad terms, they described three kinds of involvement:

- Political action and protesting
- Making their voices heard and influencing
- Being directly involved and taking decisions

### Political action and protesting

Very many submissions described people’s formal involvement in democracy in Scotland, describing voting in elections and also in the Scottish independence referendum.

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Submissions described people getting involved in one-off demonstrations and protests; for example participating in a protest against racism.

The experience of more sustained involvement in issues was also described, such as campaigning for marginalised or disadvantaged groups; or protesting about a local issue of concern, examples included campaigning for asylum seekers' rights and opposing the closure of a local hospital.

### Making voices heard and influencing

Submissions described how people sought to make their voices heard in local decision-making. People described being involved in local consultations; for example, having a say in how a local park was developed and managed.

Others described positive involvement in more formal exercises organised to hear the views of the community, for example a Poverty Commission and a local charrette:

*“Our voices were heard and reflected in the East Lothian Poverty Commission”*

The experience of taking part in participatory budgeting exercises was frequently mentioned as a positive example of being involved. This covered city-wide exercises like ‘Dundee Decides’, and those that were highly local, such as ‘Bucks for Buckie’.

There was a strong sense that people welcomed and valued the opportunity to contribute their view on local issues. People particularly recalled that experience positively when they felt listened to and that their opinion had influenced decisions.

### Being directly involved and taking decisions

Some people described their experience of being a formal representative in a variety of forums; for example, parent council of local school, as a community councillor, in a school youth forum:

*“Being involved in school decisions made me feel empowered”*

There were many descriptions of the positive impact people felt through getting involved in their community as a volunteer, participating in local activities, regularly with organised groups, taking part in fundraising. This covered a range of local community groups such as playgroups and youth clubs, local faith organisations, food banks.

A very practical example of local involvement, that reflects the connection within communities referred to above, is evident from a community conversation:

*“Local events organised by volunteers were offered as an example of effective local planning and decision-making. Events included the Christmas lights and a carnival both of which brought people in the community together.”*

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Some responses described the importance of local groups, largely of communities of interest and identity, acting as a source of networking and support for people with shared experiences, for example adult learners and a women's group:

*“Great experiences of women coming together locally”.*

### Negative experiences of being involved

Responses to DM described much activity and energy in communities across Scotland. However, the negative experiences of trying to be involved in decisions locally were more strongly and more frequently described.

Some people from specific communities of interest and identity described finding it difficult to get involved in decisions, or having no experience of involvement at all. For example, some asylum seekers, EU citizens, foreign language groups, and some people from different ethnic minority groups described experiences of being detached from the wider community and formal decision-making organisations and forums. They did not know about local groups or understand whether and how they could get involved.

There were also descriptions of the difficulties of getting involved. For disabled people this tended to focus on issues

around transport and physical access, and cultures and behaviours that made their involvement difficult: e.g. a lack of empathy and understanding about the specific needs of disabled people, not being listened to; to more direct explicit discrimination. People from disabled groups frequently described their sense of loneliness and isolation within their community of place. Local groups of disabled people and disabled people's organisations provided an important source of support and connection.

The negative experiences of being involved in local decisions from communities of place and of interest covered a broad range:

- Tokenistic engagement
- Poor communication
- Unwelcoming structures
- Inability to effect change/inaction
- Lack of representation

### Tokenistic engagement

Many submissions, and respondents in the regional events, described in strongly negative terms, opportunities to have involvement in decisions that were regarded as being little more than tokenistic. These experiences stemmed from occasions where decisions were taken in the face of community opinion that opposed them, or where it was perceived that decisions had already been made before consulting the community.

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Submissions described people's very negative experiences of taking part in consultations: this involved not feeling listened to, that their opinions had been ignored and had had no impact on decisions. These experiences led to frustration, disenchantment and cynicism. Efforts to consult communities by public authorities were often perceived to be a 'tick-box exercise'; that they were not effectively planned and organised, and undertaken without real effort or commitment. It was seen more often than not as about satisfying a procedural requirement to consult rather than a genuine attempt to listen to communities.

### Poor communication

Poor communication from public authorities about the decisions they took was mentioned frequently in responses. People wanted to know what had happened after a consultation but complained that they did not receive any feedback explaining what had been heard from communities and what had been done as a result.

These experiences contributed to a sense of being ignored and not being informed (often perceived as deliberately) of what decisions had been taken and why. For example, the experience of using recent community empowerment legislation to make participation requests but having those requests refused, with no reasons given.

The following extract describes an example of people with experience of involvement and a belief in their own capacity to make a contribution. It is from a community conversation hosted by a development trust:

*"Everyone agreed they had been involved in decision-making locally to some degree, so there was already a level of built capacity within our communities. However, there was universal frustration that many decisions were taken remotely from the community, by people who often didn't know all the issues, and very often didn't communicate the outcomes of decisions either. So the system was far from right, as it stands."*

It also highlights a strong sense that this failure in communication, and listening, by public authorities, meant decisions did not benefit from the knowledge and experience that existed in communities.

### Unwelcoming structures

Public authorities, and councils in particular, were described as being difficult to navigate and intimidating. Despite recognised efforts to involve communities, structures were experienced as often unwelcoming. Along with the physical distance from communities, people talked in negative terms about the impact of bureaucracy and the complexity of public service system. As an example, a submission from a community conversation commented about designing such a system 'from scratch':

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*“it would not look this way and be populated with such a complex and impenetrable network of organisations.”*

As a further illustration, a submission from a community conversation commented about council partnerships and forums:

*“[they] have not been useful, being stuck in structures where citizens were not openly encouraged to debate and were subject to rules for participating in the meeting that were so formal they were not effective.”*

In some of the regional events, people described attending formal meetings of local decision-making bodies (e.g. council or community planning) held in public but not being allowed to participate, or only as an exception. They were told this was because they were ‘meetings held in public’ not ‘public meetings’. Such experiences of the application of formal rules of procedure were seen as symptomatic of structures and cultures that did not support, value or encourage community involvement.

### Lack of representation

Many submissions, and participants at the regional events, identified the lack of opportunity for communities to have a place on the range of decision-making bodies and local forums. This was a particular concern for decisions about the issues that directly affected different communities, as this example illustrates:

*“We have no disabled people’s participation at a planning or strategic level shaping the delivery of health and social care”*

### Inability to effect change/inaction

Submissions described communities’ particular frustration at the experience of raising concerns about local problems or particular needs, or making complaints, which appeared to be ignored by local bodies. Communities were looking for authorities not only to display that they were listening but to act.

For some people, these were very immediate issues to do with problems with their housing, or about the state of their local environment such as litter, graffiti and dog fouling. It was clear that these had an impact on the quality of life of communities. People understood that the impact of funding reductions contributed to these issues, but did not explain the lack of improvements they experienced, nor the failure to communicate with communities about them.

A common theme was the distance between the decision makers and the local community. This was expressed as frustration about decisions made by public bodies perceived as lacking the knowledge and understanding of local experience and concerns. For some communities, particularly in rural areas, this was also expressed in terms of the physical distance of communities from where decision-makers were located.

People spoke about decisions being made without an understanding of the local community, and of decisions having a bias in favour of a particular geographic area. In one example, council officers no longer had a budget to travel to local communities and therefore could not learn directly from citizens about local concerns.

Many submissions commented on the role of community councils, recognising their statutory position, but the lack of power they have to effect change. Views expressed about the potential of community councils and other community organisations to take on new powers over local decision-making are discussed in section five.

## Barriers to participation

In responding to the question about local decision-making, there were a number of recurring themes about the kinds of barriers that prevent people from getting involved. These are summarised in the table below:

Category	Description
Information	Lack of information about how to be involved, what opportunities there are to participate; where and how decisions are taken. Information not reaching marginalised communities about services available to support inclusion.
Complexity	System complicated – difficult to understand who is responsible for what, how things work and how to influence.
Accessibility	Transportation is non-existent or poor – and expensive – in areas. Most formal decision-making fora meet during working hours; the time available to participate can be a factor. Physical accessibility a key issue for many disabled people.
Lack of support for engagement	Inadequate support for people to overcome a range of barriers to involvement: practical barriers such as caring and other family responsibilities; and the range of barriers to inclusion experienced by marginalised and disadvantaged communities.
Style of participation	The language and behaviours of public authorities and the ways in which forums and meetings are organised restrict or discourage participation.

# Section 4: Do people want more control over decisions that affect their community?

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This section describes what people said in response to the DM question:

Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?

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The clear evidence from the submissions to DM is that people do want to have more control of decisions on issues that matter to them. This is particularly the case for decisions that are seen to directly affect communities, the control of which should be exercised more locally. The vast majority of submissions expressed views that demonstrate a strong desire for a change to the status quo.

There were some responses that described concerns; people who felt that control should not be devolved. For some, this concern was rooted in a worry that the responsibility involved in taking control of decisions was too much to ask of people, and a concern about, or a lack of confidence in, the capacity of communities to hold that responsibility. Some people were worried about how to respond to people's demands, and being held accountable for meeting them – as reflected in this quote from a community conversation: *“We don't want control of libraries – everyone would want them open all the time.”* Others raised concerns about how national standards or equalities would be maintained if power was devolved.

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It was clear, however, that what people understood by the term ‘control’ varied. Control was understood in terms of different kinds of participation in decision-making. For some this was about being able to give their views as part of decisions being made, and to have some influence. People wanted their input to lead to what they saw as better decisions that led to practical action that improved their community.

For some while expressing a wish for more control, it prompted them to ask what was meant by control:

*“Are we talking about communities making the decisions or just ‘being involved in’ the decision-making? Where does ownership begin and end?”*

At the other end, submissions were clear that it was about communities having the power and the resources to make decisions themselves. The different expressions of control in submissions can be described broadly in terms of:

- **Influence** – having a voice in, and an impact on, decision-making.
- **Transparency and accountability** – public authorities being transparent about their decisions and communities being able to hold them to account for those decisions.
- **Authority** – having the authority and resources to take decisions.

## Influence

The idea of influence described in submission was circumstances that allowed people to make a meaningful contribution to decisions that affected their lives. They contrasted that with any process that they experienced as a ‘tick-box exercise’. People want their voices to make a difference to the decisions that are taken. The following extracts from two submissions illustrates that view:

*“We wish our voices to be heard.”* (asylum seeking group)

*“We want to have a say in local issues and also have the ability to feed into bigger issues.”* (women’s group)

What came through very strongly was that people want to have more influence about what happens in their communities. The current approach of consultations does not give people influence; one person noted *“Whilst people have taken part ... many still are of the opinion that they are not listened to, and this is process rather than progress.”*

## Transparency and accountability

The theme of transparency and accountability was a very strong one throughout the submissions. People wanted public bodies and elected representatives to communicate honestly and directly. Formal and statutory arrangements for accountability did not seem to translate into

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the way people experienced public services. There was a sense this should be done as a principle, to demonstrate accountability by public authorities to the communities they served.

But there were also practical reasons given for this accountability. There was understanding that decisions are difficult and that not everyone will be happy, but that communities wanted, and needed, to have information that helped them understand the reasons for any particular decision. These extracts illustrate this perspective:

*“Listen to people, explain to locals why things can’t be done.”*

*“Those at the meeting did not want to have to make all these decisions themselves, but they wanted those in decision-making roles to be more accountable.”* (community conversation)

## Authority

There were submissions from a range of different communities of place and of interest or identity that explicitly supported communities taking direct control of local decisions. This centred on having the authority to take those decisions and the associated resources, and budget, that would allow those decisions to be put into action. The costs of this change were also recognised: that investment in supporting this change, capacity-building and

infrastructure to support communities would also be necessary. At the regional events, some felt that communities with authority over certain decisions would be well placed to also exert influence over, and hold to account, existing decision-makers.

*“Communities should have more control over decisions and/or services in their local area.”* (community conversation)

*“We need both ‘purse strings and the rubber stamp’ locally in order to make decisions – i.e., control over budget and the authority to make the final decision.”* (community conversation)

*“Local Democracy must come with a budget.”* (community conversation)

## What outcomes would greater community involvement bring?

Some submissions were able to describe a range of outcomes that communities felt would come from greater involvement and the ability to exercise control over decisions. This was also explored specifically as a discussion topic at the regional events. Most participants had a clear sense of what they would like done differently and were able to express the associated benefits.

Outcomes described covered the benefits from being involved (process), and in the impact in communities. The ‘process’ benefits were often described in terms of

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values that people wanted to see expressed and embodied in the way in which decisions were taken. They also spoke to the impact involvement would have on communities own 'sense of self'. The benefits described included:

- Increasing the self-confidence of communities and their sense of worth
- Building the resilience of communities; greater connection and less isolation between community members
- Tapping into innovation and creativity in communities to tackle local issues
- Making tailored decisions to meet different needs of communities
- Increased trust in democracy/decision-making. Less cynicism
- Greater transparency in decision-making, better understanding of decisions
- Decisions based on local knowledge and understanding
- More people will get involved. Getting more young people involved.
- New relationship between state and citizen; between communities and public services/government

The substantive impacts included:

- A more democratic and cohesive society
- Less bureaucracy and red tape
- More efficient and effective services

which better meet the needs of communities

- Health and well-being of communities
- A broad range of improvements to quality of life
- Getting things done – communities able to act more swiftly, more agile and flexible
- Local economic development

### What issues do people want control over?

Across the responses as a whole, communities expressed an appetite and ambition for greater involvement in, or control of, decisions on nearly every policy issue for which public authorities have responsibility. In general, it could be seen that the issues identified largely reflected the lived experience and concerns of the specific community of place and/or community of interest or identity.

For some communities, their responses related to very specific issues and concerns that affected the quality of their daily lives in relation to for example, issues of disadvantage and discrimination, inclusion, negative aspects of their local physical and social environment, the quality of their public housing, their access to and use of specific public services.

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For other communities, their responses were more about contributing to decisions that would benefit the wider community, meet community wishes and needs, support the social and physical regeneration of their local area. Some of the issues that were identified more frequently were as follows:

#### Examples of local issues

Community policing: including strategies, community safety

Education: including placements, how schools are run, engaging parents

Environmental maintenance: including dog fouling, litter, cleanliness, fly-tipping, waste collection and recycling

Health and social care provision

Leisure programmes and community services

Local activities and opportunities for children and young people

Physical environment and regeneration: including housing, derelict buildings, gap sites

Planning and development

Public transport: including availability, scheduling and timetabling, siting of bus stops, bus routes

Roads: including general maintenance and potholes, speed limits, traffic calming, cycling provision, gritting and snow clearance, parking availability and charges

The majority of responses indicate that communities want to see changes to how they are involved in decisions that affect their community. There is not support for the status quo. These changes cover, in summary:

- To be treated better by public authorities – a change in culture and behaviour about involving communities in decisions.
- To be better connected – within communities (pooling knowledge and resources); and with decision-makers.
- To be able to participate in decisions about their community; and, for some, that meant to have control over decisions (with the associated resources/budget).
- For decisions that affect their community to be based on knowledge and experience, which lead to action that improves their lives.

# Section 5: How do people describe their community: what does it mean to be 'local'?

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This section describes what people said in response to the DM question:

When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?

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Many submissions described local in terms of a **specific place, or geography**. For example, it was simply identified as 'my town', 'my village'. In a large city, some submissions described local as being 'the neighbourhood'. A distinction was often drawn in this case between what were seen as the artificial boundaries around which different public services and councils were organised, and what was described as 'natural communities', that made sense to people locally.

Some described it in terms of **size, or distance**, for example: 'the area you can walk around'.

Others identified that what was regarded as local related to the specific issue. They identified that decisions might appropriately be taken at different 'levels' (e.g. national/local/community). The following illustrates this:

*'I live in a village but community to me also includes the whole county. There are some*

*decisions that affect these as a whole but some that are irrelevant to smaller towns and villages.'* (postcard)

Many submissions also made an association between **social connections, and a shared sense of identity and belonging**. The following extracts from responses illustrate this:

*"a place where there is community spirit"  
"old and young working together helping each other"*

Communities of interest/identity were likely to describe 'local' in these terms, as based around **shared experience** and identity.

Some submissions made the point that ideas about local need not necessarily refer to a physical place but may relate to communities **online**, an example of this was the LGBTI community.

The difficulty in answering this question is captured by this comment:

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“Local is entirely subjective and for many a relative concept. Local is primarily about identity rather than necessarily defining the place where decision-making should happen.”

The photograph below shows how understandings of what it means to be “local” were discussed and represented in one of the community conversations:

There were a few submissions that did try to develop a specific definition of ‘local’ that might operate when thinking about community-level decision-making. For example, a submission suggested that ‘community level’ could be defined by an upper and lower limit on population size, but did not identify the size.



# Section 6: What needs to change to support and enable decision-making at the community level?

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This section describes what people said in response to the question:

Are there existing forms of decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?

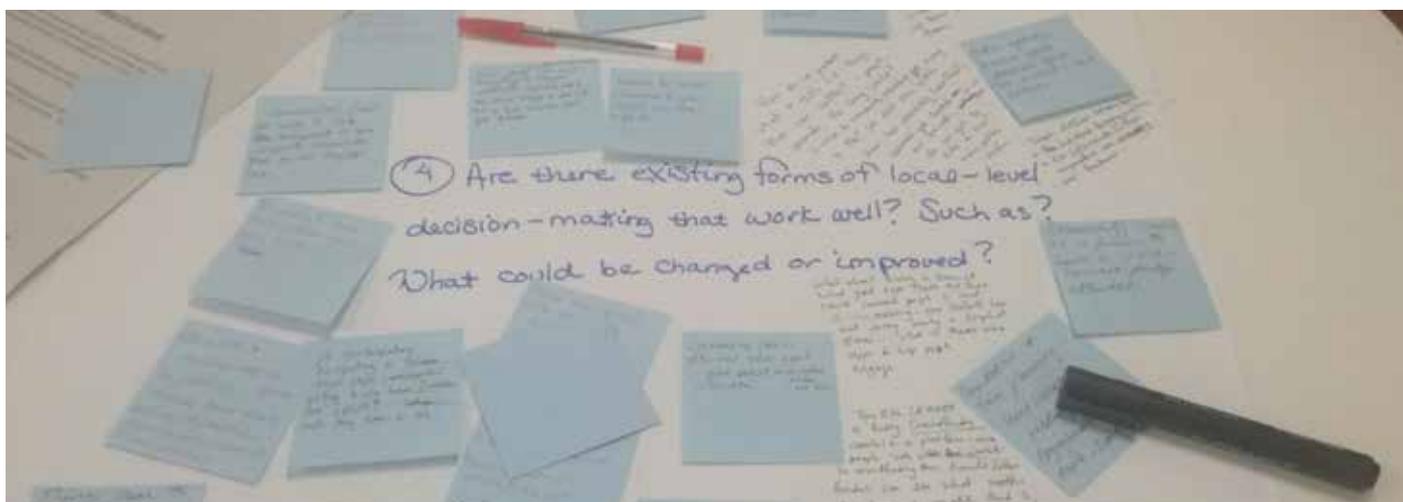
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Overall, responses described a broad array of changes that different communities chose to highlight as central to improving their ability to be involved in or be responsible for decisions that affected them.

Communities that did have experience of engagement and involvement with public authorities and decision-making structures were able to draw on that experience and

describe a broad range of changes that could be made to existing forms of decision-making. A few submissions from specific organisations provided worked up proposals of new forms of local decision-making at the community level.

Communities of interest and identity that lacked knowledge and experience of involvement in their community and with decision-making bodies were not able to



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describe how changes might be made to forms of decision-making.

The variety of contributions are described in greater detail in the rest of this section.

### Existing forms of decision-making

Across the broad sweep of responses, many existing forms of decision-making were identified that might play a role in bringing communities closer to, or involved in local decision-making. But that changes were required in order to make that a reality.

Most often mentioned were community councils, but also community development trusts, community-based housing associations and forums/partnerships that brought together other local community organisations. There was a common view that any new arrangements should reflect local circumstances; that 'one size does not fit all'.

There were a range of views and experiences of community councils described in responses. Many responses on community councils were supportive of, and ambitious for, their potential to take on more local powers, with changes. These highlighted their statutory basis and that they are the only community-level organisation requiring democratic election, but it was felt community councils had not been properly resourced, supported and empowered. A range of issues were identified to be resolved including that councils are not standardly representative of the diversity of their

community, and in practice many community councillors are not formally elected. Some felt a new form or structure of community councils was needed. Commonly, those hopeful about community councils felt that more power and resources would: motivate more diverse and higher quality involvement; allow councils to be more proactive for the community; and that training and support would also help the effectiveness of councillors. As part of these reflections, comparisons were made with the role, status and set-up of English parish councils, which was felt to allow them a more effective role.

Others, fewer in number, held strongly negative views or experiences of community councils and did not think they should take on local decision-making. They were regarded as unrepresentative, ineffective and reactive, self-interested and 'cliquey'.

Other examples of existing decision-making identified included: advisory groups, locality planning groups, community planning partnerships, school boards and parent councils, the Scottish rural and youth parliaments, participatory budgeting arrangements, local third sector organisations, other local community forums.



Responses described a range of changes identified as necessary enablers for community-level decision-making. They covered the following themes:

- Supporting people to participate
- Building participation into the system
- Changing the culture and behaviours of public authorities towards community participation

### Supporting people to participate

Many responses, particularly from those communities who described being very distant from decision-making, highlighted the importance of very basic knowledge and information to support participation. This covered knowledge of the rights and responsibilities as individual citizens, the system of democracy in Scotland, information about which public authorities were responsible for decisions on which issues,

information about the ways in which citizens and communities were able to be involved in and influence decisions that affect them.

Responses pointed to the importance variously of education at school and further or higher education to provide foundational knowledge about citizenship and democracy. Also identified was more practical and localised activity to provide information and raise awareness about how to get involved in decisions that affect different communities. This was also raised in relation to measures that would particularly encourage and support the greater involvement of young people.

More specific skills and capacity building activity was also highlighted. This tended to focus on more practical aspects for community groups and organisations, providing knowledge and information, and training, about how to operate as formal organisations (such as governance and accountability, financial, administrative skills), and take on more responsibility.

Some responses also highlighted the contribution of specific roles, positions that could play a significant part in supporting people to participate. This covered people in communities playing a leadership role as a 'champion' for the community, engagement and participation practitioners (working in public authorities or third and community sector); local people training to develop skills to help support and encourage other community members.

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The use of technology was a strong theme as an additional method that could better support people to participate. The use of social media, smart phone applications, and online were described variously as means to enable: voting online; better communication and feedback from public authorities, such as live-streaming of meetings; involvement of people who are unable to attend in person, getting community views and opinions, such as through online surveys.

### Building participation into the existing system

Some responses highlighted changes that could be made to existing ways citizens and communities could participate in decision-making. These could be further encouraged, used more widely, or strengthened. This included:

- Better consultation: genuine, effective, inclusive
- More use of charrettes
- Local development plans (or community plans)
- Locality planning
- Community action planning
- Participation requests
- Participatory Budgeting
- Place standard

Other suggestions focused on how communities could be better involved in existing forums, groups and decision-making structures such as:

- Access panels – giving local statutory consultee status for disability groups
- Advisory Groups to existing decision-making structures
- Area partnerships – giving equity for community representatives
- Community representation on councils
- Collaborative, partnership working between communities and local public authorities
- Creation of partnership groups to include council and local people
- Representation of local people in quasi-government bodies
- Short-life working groups
- Nurturing and supporting greater involvement from young people

## Changing the culture and behaviours of public authorities towards community participation

Responses identified a range of changes to the cultures and behaviours of public authorities in the way in which they treated communities trying to get involved in decision-making. This focused particularly on a change in culture to one that trusted and respected the contribution of communities, achieved a sense of parity of esteem, and which took practical steps to apply inclusive approaches to support diversity.

Across the submissions, a range of positive values were described that people wanted to see expressed in the way in which communities are enabled to participate by public authorities. These values describe:

- How public authorities should treat communities
- How communities and public authorities should work together
- New ways of working in partnership that deliver practical actions to improve outcomes for communities

These values are set out in the table below.

### Values to guide our democratic system and community participation

How communities should be treated by public authorities:	How communities and public authorities should work together:	New ways of working to improve outcomes for communities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Parity of system</li> <li>• Openness</li> <li>• Valued</li> <li>• Empowered</li> <li>• Inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Deliberative</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Negotiation</li> <li>• Solidarity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Action-oriented</li> <li>• Risk-taking</li> <li>• Vision and ambition</li> <li>• Vibrant</li> </ul>

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## New forms of decision-making

Some community organisations, with knowledge and experience of the current system of decision-making, described possible new structures or mechanisms for community decision-making. For some this was described as requiring a new tier of democracy; but others were explicitly opposed to such a development.

Many identified that any power to take decisions required resource and/or budget in order to deliver those decisions. Suggestions included: using mini-publics: citizens' assemblies or juries; a community charter; community deals (like city deals).

A few organisations provided worked up proposals of new forms of local decision-making at the community level and described how they could be constituted, their accountability, and how they could fit into the existing system of decision-making.

Across the submissions as a whole, a range of measures were variously identified that communities feel would help enable better community involvement in, or control over, decisions.

- Knowledge and education about people's rights and responsibilities as citizens, information about how (and which) public authorities take decisions that affect their communities, and information about how they can get involved in decisions.
- Practical training and organisational development for community groups and organisations to enable them to take on more responsibility.
- Greater influence over decisions made by public authorities and the means to hold those authorities better to account for those decisions.
- Community participation in/membership of existing decision-making institutions/structures (e.g. area communities, local community planning groups).
- New structures of community governance: either changing the functions and/or authority of existing community organisations such as community councils, or development trusts, or community-run housing associations; or designing completely new structures at the community level.

# Section 7: Other issues raised

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This section describes what people said in response to the final question:

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

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There was no single strong general message from responses to this question. Many submissions focused on reiterating points made earlier, particularly in relation to the need for change.

Many expressed the importance of hearing back what was going to happen next in the DM process.

One submission ended with this 'bulletin board' summary:



# ANNEX A

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## Membership of Enabling Group

Name	Organisation
Tressa Burke	Glasgow Disability Alliance
Malcolm Burr (Deputised by Rona Gold)	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Carroll Buxton	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Ian Cooke	Development Trusts Association Scotland
Vicky Freeman (Formerly Dr Elizabeth Ireland)	National Health Service in Scotland
Fiona Garven	Scottish Community Development Centre
Oonagh Gil	Scottish Government
Angus Hardie	Scottish Community Alliance
Martin Johnstone	Church of Scotland
Karyn McCluskey	Community Justice Scotland
Claire McPherson (Formerly Donna Mackinnon)	Scottish Government
Professor James Mitchell	Edinburgh University
Jane O'Donnell (Formerly Brenda Campbell)	COSLA
Tanveer Parnez (Deputised by Danny Boyle)	BEMIS
Kay Sillars (Formerly Dave Watson)	Unison
Willie Sullivan	Electoral Reform Society
Lorna Trainer and Janet Torley (shared membership)	Federation of Small Businesses
Suki Wan	Scottish Youth Parliament





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