

## DEMOCRACY MATTERS 2 – DRAFT CONSULTATION RESPONSE

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### 1.0 HEADLINES

- 1.1 This report provides Members with a proposed response to the Democracy Matters 2 (DM2) consultation, for their consideration and comment (attached at appendix 1).

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:-

- 2.1 Consider the proposed DM2 consultation response; and
- 2.2 Agree that the draft response is submitted to the Scottish Government by the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024 deadline.

### 3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The Local Governance Review was jointly launched in December 2017 by the Scottish Government (SG) and COSLA, consisting of two strands:-
- 1) Community level decision making and
  - 2) Public service governance
- 3.2 Strand 1 focused on communities and was entitled Democracy Matters. A phase 1 consultation was held between May and December 2018, which invited views from communities on their experiences of getting involved in local decision making, whether they would like more control over some decisions/any service areas, what local means to them, and what structures/processes could allow for more power to be exercised by communities. Phase 1 attracted input from circa 4000 respondents.
- 3.3 The Council undertook a programme of engagement to inform a response to the consultation, which included 10 'Big Listen' events across Argyll and Bute plus an online webchat. The formal response to Phase 1 was approved by Council on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2018 and can be accessed [here](#).
- 3.4 Phase 2 of the Democracy Matters conversation was launched by SG and COSLA on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2023, with responses invited by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Phase 2 is about asking communities to get together to consider a series of scenarios and questions, based on the 6 key findings from phase 1, which are

summarised below:-

- 1) Powers – respondents said they wanted to see a real shift in power in favour of communities. This should provide autonomy to make improvements and reimagine how a range of public services work in their area.
- 2) Representation - respondents said they value representative democracy but also want to see a more diverse set of people in decision making roles.
- 3) Accountability and participation - respondents said that decision makers must involve the community and be accountable to them for the difference made with the total resource available.
- 4) Setting local boundaries and priorities - respondents said that setting boundaries and setting priorities are interrelated and that communities should be helped to decide these for themselves.
- 5) Standards, resources and relationships - respondents said that new arrangements must be resourced, integrated with existing democratic decision making structures, and take account of everyone's needs.
- 6) Nurturing community capacities - respondents said communities should be able to move at their own pace, and that they will need tailored support.

3.5 The Council has promoted the consultation to Community Councils (CCs) and other community groups, to support the focus on communities hosting local conversations to assist in formulating their responses. Information events, hosted by the Improvement Service specifically for CCs, have also been promoted, as well as details of the SG Democracy Matters Fund, which has been set up to provide up to £300 expenses support to any organisation/group organising a local event.

3.6 A draft response has been prepared by the Council and is attached at appendix 1 for consideration. To assist in the formulation of our response, a Members Seminar was held on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to brief Councillors on the consultation and to invite feedback and comments on the proposals. The key points arising from this session have been incorporated into the response under the relevant questions, including:-

- Why re-invent the wheel? Importance of investing in the current important democratic processes and structures which are deemed to be fit for purpose from our perspective;
- No clear rationale or evidence to support the creation of a further tier of governance, which has the potential to clutter the landscape and result in further resource and financial pressures;
- The consultation proposals assume that all groups wish to be represented and want to come together to participate in local decision making. Experience in Argyll and Bute illustrates that current levels of engagement and participation can vary considerably across different communities. For example a large number of CCs are formed by nominations as there are not enough candidates to formally elect or, in some cases, are not able to be formed at all due to a lack of participation.
- How do you define a community? There will be major differences across Scotland in terms of what this could mean and will depend on the demographic of the area, with notable variances across urban/semi rural/rural area. In Argyll and Bute there is the possibility of identifying

literally hundreds of communities.

- The proposals are not clear on whether local groups/volunteers will be remunerated for their role in any new decision making body – clarity has been sought on what is envisaged here.

3.7 Members are asked to approve the draft response and agree that Officers submit it to the Scottish Government by the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024 deadline.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

4.1 Phase 2 of the Democracy Matters conversation was launched in August 2023, following on from the initial phase undertaken in 2018. Details of the consultation has been promoted to our communities via CCs and other local groups and organisations. The Council's proposed response is attached at appendix 1 for Members consideration.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Policy – none at present but potential for significant implications due to emerging national reform
- 5.2 Financial – none at present but potential for additional cost pressures, depending on outcome of emerging reforms
- 5.3 Legal – none at present but potential for new legislative requirements
- 5.4 HR – none at present but potential requirement for additional resource to support implementation
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty – none
  - 5.5.1 Equalities – Protected Characteristics - none
  - 5.5.2 Socio Economic Duty - none
  - 5.5.3 Islands - none
- 5.6 Climate Change - none
- 5.7 Risk – failure to influence the national development of public sector reform
- 5.7 Customer Service – none
- 5.8 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - none

#### **6.0 APPENDICES**

6.1 Appendix 1 – draft DM2 response

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23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024