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**Local Governance Review – Feedback from the Big Listen Events in Oban, Lorn and the Isles.**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The programme for Scottish government 2017-18 set out the intention to “decentralise power to a more local level in Scotland and launch a comprehensive review of local governance ahead of a Local Democracy Bill later in this Parliament”. The Scottish Government’s local governance review consultation was launched 28 May 2018 and entitled ‘Democracy Matters’ and will close 14 December 2018.
- 1.2 The first phase is aimed primarily at communities to better understand how decisions and their impacts are best taken at community level. The second stage of the consultation is aimed primarily at Community Planning Partnerships and public sector organisations who are encouraged to offer proposals for improved governance arrangements at their level of place.
- 1.3 In preparation, the Chief Executive embarked on an extensive engagement programme with communities across Argyll and Bute and online to inform the Council’s response which will be considered by the Council at its meeting on 27 September 2018.
- 1.4 This report sets out the background to the consultation and more explicitly provides a narrative on the key themes and comments captured at our events on Coll, Mull and Oban and the online webchat session.
- 1.5 It is recommended that the Oban Lorn and the Isles Area Committee:
  - a) Notes and considers the content of this paper and the views expressed by local communities in relation to the local governance review consultation;
  - b) Notes and considers that an overarching report which will contain a draft response to the Scottish Government consultation ‘Democracy Matters’ will be submitted for consideration by the Council on the 27 September 2018.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The programme for Scottish government 2017-18 set out the intention to “decentralise power to a more local level in Scotland and launch a comprehensive review of local governance ahead of a Local Democracy Bill later in this Parliament”.
- 2.2 The first phase is aimed primarily at communities to better understand how decisions and their impacts are best taken at community level. The second phase of the consultation is aimed primarily at Community Planning Partnerships and public sector organisations who are encouraged to offer proposals for improved governance arrangements at their level of place.
- 2.3 In preparation, the Chief Executive embarked on an extensive engagement programme with communities across Argyll and Bute and online to inform the Council’s response which will be considered by the Council at its meeting on 27 September 2018.
- 2.4 This report sets out the background to the consultation and more explicitly provides a narrative on the key themes and comments captured at our events on Coll, Mull and Oban and the online webchat session.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that members of the Oban Lorn and the Isles Area Committee:

- 3.1 Notes and considers the content of this paper and the views expressed by local communities in relation to the local governance review consultation;
- 3.2 Notes and considers that an overarching report which will contain a draft response to the Scottish Government consultation ‘Democracy Matters’ will be submitted for consideration by the Council on the 27 September 2018.

## 4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The programme for Scottish government 2017-18 set out the intention to “decentralise power to a more local level in Scotland and launch a comprehensive review of local governance ahead of a Local Democracy Bill later in this Parliament”. The Scottish Government and COSLA jointly announced the consultation in December 2017 and it was launched in May 2018. Entitled ‘Democracy Matters’, the consultation is in two phases and will close 14 December 2018.
- 4.2 The first phase is aimed primarily at communities to better understand how decisions and their impacts are best taken at community level. The second phase of the consultation is aimed primarily at Community Planning Partnerships and public sector organisations who are encouraged to offer proposals for improved governance arrangements at their level of place.
- 4.3 Given the significant importance of this consultation to the future of public services in Scotland, in preparation the Chief Executive committed to an extensive programme of engagement across Argyll and Bute with communities to inform the development of the Council response. Initially entitled the ‘Future of Public Services – Your Voice’, it received the additional title of ‘The Big Listen’ to reflect the focus on hearing the views of residents within our communities.
- 4.4 Between April and June 2018, Council officers hosted evening engagement events in Coll, Campbeltown, Lochgilphead, Helensburgh, Mull, Islay, Bute, Dunoon and Oban. In addition a ‘webchat’ event followed to allow anyone unable to attend one of the above events to participate in a session online. A final event was held on Jura at the end of July 2018.
- 4.5 Format

Each event commenced with a one hour ‘open doors’ session where people could drop in for an introduction to the event, have an informal discussion, meet council staff and raise issues relevant to their communities. The formal event commenced immediately afterwards and lasted two hours commencing with a short presentation to set some context before the topics were considered in detail through a series of focus groups. Each group was facilitated by council staff but the focus was on the views of attendees. At the end of the session, feedback was provided from each group so that all attendees were party to the points raised within other groups. Each group worked through 5 key themes aligned to the focus of the Democracy Matters consultation as set out as follows;

1. How would you want to contribute to making decisions for your local community? And what would help you to become more involved?
  2. How effective are arrangements for making decisions about your public services? What could be improved? Is it more influence over decision making by public bodies, is it the transfer of services and budgets to community control or something else?
  3. Would you support community control over any services? If so, which ones? Are there any areas where community control should not be considered? If not, why not?
  4. How should organisations that run public services be accountable for the decisions taken to those who reside in our communities? Who should monitor performance of those services?
  5. What would you like public services to look like in Argyll and Bute in 5 years' time?
- 4.6 For each event, a summary of the key points and view expressed has been prepared in a narrative form – the summary for the events held within Oban Lorn and the Isles are attached as appendices to this report. Also appended is a short overview of the webchat session. Over the events over 220 residents participated in an in depth consideration of the issues which will assist with forming a council response. The relevant event reports are being used to inform an overarching report to be considered by the Council on the 27 September 2018 as the Council's response to the national consultation.
- 4.7 It is unknown at this stage what the proposed Local Democracy Bill will look like however it is noted that it has the potential to have a long term impact on how decisions are made affecting our communities in Argyll and Bute. It also has the potential to generate organisational or structural change or introduce the transfer of powers between or from spheres of government and communities. It is important that the Council (and any other public organisation, community group or individuals from the area) makes a full submission during this consultation phase to influence the best possible outcome for our communities.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The programme for Scottish government 2017-18 set out the intention to “decentralise power to a more local level in Scotland and launch a comprehensive review of local governance ahead of a Local Democracy Bill later in this Parliament”.

- 5.2 In preparation, the Chief Executive embarked on a programme of engagement with communities across Argyll and Bute and online to inform the Council's response which will be considered by the Council on the 27 September 2018.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Policy; none at this stage.
- 6.2 Financial; none at this stage
- 6.3 Legal; none at this stage
- 6.4 HR; none at this stage
- 6.5 Equalities; none at this stage
- 6.6 Risk; none at this stage
- 6.7 Customer Service; none at this stage

**Chief Executive;** Cleland Sneddon

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**Date;** 10 August 2018

Appendices:

1. Future of Public Services – What You Said on Coll 19 April 2018
2. Future of Public Services – What You Said on Mull 10 May 2018
3. Future of Public Services – What You Said in Oban 21 June 2018
4. Future of Public Services – What You Said via the Webchat 18 June 2018

## **Appendix 1**

### **THE BIG LISTEN Future of Public Services – Your Voice What You Said on the Isle of Coll 19 April 2018**

Over twenty people attended our first event on a stunningly beautiful evening so thanks to the residents of Coll for turning out. Key themes that emerged over the evening was broadband connectivity, communications, the Council's Planning Services, Calmac ferries and the Islands Bill.

Housing for local people as well as those wishing to move to the island is critically important to support the school roll and to meet an increasing housing demand for workers. It was emphasised by a majority on Coll that the demand for new housing is not restricted to social housing and includes the need for affordable private housing. The challenge was seen as securing consent and the timeline for approval.

With regards to planning policy, enquiries regarding development in 'Potential Development Areas' (specific areas zoned in the Local Development Plan has having potential for development and where known constraints can be overcome) seems to generate more questions than answers from Planning Services in a cycle of correspondence without getting to a satisfactory conclusion.

One suggestion is that for the Local Development Plan (the spatial policy document developed by Planning Services for assessing planning applications), be simplified for small islands like Coll. It was suggested this could be done by having less developments zones and more focus on support for locals to secure planning and building standard consents. This could develop a build-up of confidence that residents could make enquiries without concern of coming under investigation.

An example of further changes to national legislation is an extension of permitted development rights (developments where planning consent is universally granted in advance) and less applications being determined by committee. If more approvals were in the hands of local officers without requiring sign off from management or

committee, it was felt this would speed the process for development. It was suggested that formal use of Community Councils as a 'filter' for 'community feeling' could assist the development and to ensure planning timescales don't become a barrier.

With specific regards to planning and building standards, where this may result in a change to national legislation and procedures, this may form part of the Council's comments in its consultation response.

Some residents are concerned at the way decisions by the public sector may be reached (regardless of activity or policy); are approval processes always required, are they proportionate and/or risk based? One suggestion is that the assessment of proposals or applications should commence with an assumption of approval in favour of the applicant at the outset. Also where the proposal or application clearly does not satisfactorily meet a requirement of policy and procedure, only then is there a requirement for scrutiny and consideration can be given to a refusal. Within this suggested model, more decision making can be delegated to local officers as with the planning suggestion earlier and it is assumed in straight forward matters that decisions will be taken more quickly.

With regards to what services communities could control, there was clearly a mixed response. One of our focus groups was clearly of a consensus that residents are too busy (working and often in multiple occupations and raising families) and do not have the time and capacity to manage/ control services. This should not be taken as a lack of aspiration but a reality check and people are already paid to run services so 'let them get on with it!' Some expressed difficulty with the notion of increased community control over services as this may result in a conflict of interest and certainly do not devolve decision making over planning applications as this would be open to accusations of abuse of power.

Nonetheless, individual views considered that the community would welcome control over roads maintenance, grass cutting, moorings, pier maintenance and other activities that could boost local employment opportunities. Such roles could potentially be run locally by the community council and/or Development Coll with

powers delegated from the public authority providing local accountability to local matters. This may or may not include a transfer of budgets to deliver local services. Alternative models should be explored including partnerships for more technical or challenging activities e.g. recycling.

The 'island proofing' element of the current Islands Bill is considered as having the potential to significantly change how public services are run in favour of islands and currently public agencies have 'too much power' to make decisions without greater local consultation. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Health and Safety Executive were mentioned along with the Council as organisations that need a more consultative approach. It remains to be seen what 'island proofing' means in reality and this will be closely monitored.

As to what public services could look like in 5 years' time, the top priority of the public sector should be inclusive sustainable economic development. One resident commented that Local Government needs to be non-political to allow party politics to be taken out of delivering for local communities from national down to community level. Whilst such a model could deliver more efficiencies in a unitary authority model, it would remove the current democratic rights of residents to elect to Local Government their local representatives.

The Isle of Coll does not have a community led action plan and one resident considers one is not required as it for local authorities to develop and implement these; this was a minority view. Others suggested a focus on supporting private enterprise and development of infrastructure including a digital environment for improved communications and to allow more people to work from home i.e. be resident on Coll whilst working for organisations elsewhere.

Improved communications and increased consultation were recurring themes. As touched on above, some consider public sector organisations do not consult enough and often make decisions which have a real (and possible adverse) impact on local communities without having visited first to understand. Public sector representatives of influence should travel regularly around their area to engage with their communities and particularly islands who often feel 'forgotten'.



With regards to accountability, some attendees considered that a consultative approach to the design and delivery of services should be more embedded within the culture of the public sector and where performance is poor, decision makers are held to account for lack of engagement and in extreme cases can be fired! Regardless of who or where decisions are made, decision makers should be named and held personally accountable. The monitoring of performance in public bodies should be undertaken by elected representatives who are independent of national and local government and are able to scrutinise performance including consultation and communications.

The public sector is viewed as bureaucratic with multiple layers. Essentially recipients often do not care who is delivering services, as long as it gets done. Residents who know specifically who to contact are deemed to be more successful in engaging public services than when they engage through generic channels e.g. customer service point. One key suggestion made was for a single point of contact (or agent) for each of the islands. Their role would be to sign post residents to services, understand and report on key issues and improve communications and in turn increase the ability of communities to influence decisions.

In looking forward to what public services could look like in 5 years' time, suggestions included a reversal of falling community representation, increased 'joined up' thinking by the public sector and parallel to this communities taking more responsibility for decision making. Public services need to be financially strong to make it happen including improving collaboration focussed on issues important to communities. Less disagreement about how to use diminishing resources and more focus on ensuring good quality public services are adequately funded. Good managers need to be in place with a suitable level of autonomy to manage people, services and budgets. Liaising directly with communities, they would be able to ensure decisions are made for the longer term (reduce quick wins that are unsustainable) and make small improvements/adjustments that could accumulate greater savings over time.

To summarise key messages from this event, the public sector needs to increase and improve how they engage communities who can feel forgotten. People are busy and there are mixed views on increasing community control over services but a greater consensus to increase community influence over decisions.

With regards to securing consents from the public sector for regulated activity, there was some support for more decision making to be delegated and the public sector should ensure they are actually necessary and the processes should start with an assumption of approval for applicants to speed up decision making.

In the future the 'island proofing' element of the Islands Bill will have a positive impact, the public sector will be focussed on the inclusive socio-economic growth of communities and it will be easier for individuals to work from home in remote rural locations.

The final key message is for the council to have a single point of contact within communities where everybody can receive guidance on who to contact regarding services making it easier for communities to increase influence decisions affecting their communities.

## **Appendix 2**

### **THE BIG LISTEN Future of Public Services – Your Voice What You Said on Mull 10 May 2018**

Thirty six residents turned out for the event at Aros Hall for what was the busiest event so far.

Key themes that emerged over the evening was one size does not fit all and a sense of frustration with the complicated landscape of the public sector. There was a clear willingness to engage with the public sector to make things better for the island.

Some of the attendees were clear that the public sector has a tendency to apply a one size fits all approach for all locations which can result in a failure to identify local solutions to local issues including housing and roads. Some attendees expressed a very strong sense that the community had the knowledge, skills, experience and proven ability to make things happen. They believe there is already a proven track record of successful delivery and operation of community activities on Mull including the harbour, sports facilities, community woodland company etc.

This community did not asked for support from the public sector to make these things happen and believed they had brought them forward from their own initiative. However there was an expressed frustration resulting in a lack of trust when the public sector was perceived to have created obstacles for a project that had the support of the community. There was an acknowledgement that sometimes these came from legislative or regulatory processes but nonetheless a more solution focussed approach was strongly desired.

Some attendees believed small communities can feel “outweighed” by the needs of our larger towns and that the public sector needs to be more responsive to specific community needs. Staff should receive training and awareness regarding the unique characteristics of our islands. Other attendees expressed a feeling that other communities get more budget allocated to them (Oban in particular).

The Council did have for a short while a really good app for promoting council services and now it's gone; can this please come back?

With regards to effective arrangements for making decisions about public services, some attendees considered that formal and proper community impact assessment should be required when the public sector considers their decisions e.g. impact of the Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) on infrastructure from increased traffic and no resources provided to deal with impact.

Scottish Government and Council funding does not take into account the population that is actually on the island in the summer which can be far greater than in the winter where there is a disproportionate effect on transport infrastructure.

For many attendees there was significant frustration that when public sector organisations consult, the process can appear tokenistic and often perceived that the public sector already have in advance a preferred solution. For example Scottish Water opted for Mishnish lochs for a water supply and not Loch Frisa which was the community choice and Mull has since suffered from water shortages which has adversely impacted on planning decisions i.e. difficulty in securing consent for a new house due to insufficient water supply. Some attendees advised that the public sector should not consult with the community council only on planning applications and ensure to consult with the wider community and business owners and take benefit of local knowledge, don't ignore it!

A final point regarding consultation raised by some attendees was that the public sector could improve their feedback on the outcomes of the consultation.

There is a lack of understanding of the 'who's who' in the public sector and how decisions are made with regards to funding for services. Some attendees commented that whilst there is a clear delegation of powers from the UK Government at the top down to community councils (i.e. via Scottish Government, Local Government etc.), there is clearly a lack of 'bottom up'/escalation of the needs and desires of communities to sufficiently influence policies and legislation which has an impact on communities.

One attendee praised the leadership of the Council for appearing to have a clear understanding of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 with clear guidance and information on how residents and groups can benefit from this legislation. For some there does appear however to be a disconnect with the actions of staff in public sector organisations who seem to lack awareness of the legislation and how they can help. It was suggested that training for staff would help communities to benefit from the legislation and in turn help the public sector in what could be a virtuous cycle (i.e. community led activity in response to need).

When exploring whether there was support for community control over any services, there was an acceptance from some attendees in a positive way, communities sometime have to and should do things for themselves. They embraced the principle but highlighted any unnecessary bureaucracy and short sighted decision making that would get in the way of long term ambitions can impact on the ability of communities to act for themselves. A concern was if communities take over services would any financial allocation go with them and would they be subject to the annual reduction on resources experienced by public sector organisations. A concern for many was that it would then be about community spending its energy fundraising to

keep services going.

Others had a different opinion, some people feel that service delivery is what council is there to do so why should the community take it on? A third view from a group of attendees was that communities don't want the responsibility of the local authority but should have a greater say in how decisions are made, and be involved in those decisions. To be effective community capacity building is needed for communities to understand how to have more of a say on local services. These varying views are illustrative of a lack of consensus on this question across all Big Listen sessions to date and illustrative of the breadth of views on the topic.

Despite the attendance of newly or recently returned community councils, some comments suggested a negative association with community councils which were described as having a perception of being powerless. A question posed by one of the groups was whether financial allocations could be devolved to communities through the community councils. For example the budget allocation for Amenity Services being devolved to communities or involve community decisions or a vote not dissimilar to participatory budgeting.

Some attendees highlighted that communities could take on assets but they need to be "fit for purpose". Some attendees suggested there is potential for local communities to take on the operation of local car parks & traffic regulation / enforcement. This would relate to increased powers and resources for community councils or "town councils/ groups" who make decisions about delivering for local priorities.

When considering areas where there should not be community control, there was a majority view that police, fire and health care were listed whilst some attendees were of the view that nothing was off the table.

When considering accountability for decisions on public services, some attendees suggested that communities have a long memory for promises made in the past and unfulfilled. An example given related to completing the dualing of the road between Salen and Tobermory on Mull. A number of attendees referenced a believed commitment going back to the 1950s for this work and highlighted that, although design work done was undertaken, no work has progressed and it was believed that it is increasingly unlikely this historic commitment will be realised.

The same attendees expressed a number of frustrations with Health and Social Care Services including turnover of managers, issues with GP contracts, money spent on locums and short term contracts. This was viewed as wasteful of money for services which are acknowledged by everyone as under significant financial pressure.

Some attendees suggested that representatives of the Council should come to community council meetings to discuss budget allocations whilst other attendees considered that community councils need to increase their consultation / communication to ensure they understand and represent the views of everyone who lives in their communities.

Some attendees suggested that the public sector should have the responsibility for monitoring services they deliver and the effectiveness of community councils. An alternative proposal from a community councillor was that community councils should be trained to carry out community audits to monitor impact of service provision from a community perspective. One attendee suggested that more training should be available for community councillors including varying formats (e.g. online as well as face to face) and finally that some more detailed training should be compulsory to ensure all community councillors are sufficiently prepared for the role.

The final comment on accountability was that it all centres around communications i.e. good communications can improve decision making, understanding and ultimately a sense of accountability whilst poor communications may result in the outcome being the opposite.

When exploring what services could look like in 5 years' time, some attendees were clear that the island of Mull could achieve some level of local autonomy and have control of their own budgets and decision making processes. This would include town planning, roads and amenity services and possibly education. The same attendees acknowledged that there are technical and legislative expertise on the council which should be commercially accessible in the same way that community groups can access the private sector services. Other attendees concluded that the community of Mull could take some responsibility for services to be delivered if sufficiently resourced however acknowledged the same could be said for all public bodies including the Council.

Public sector owned land should be freed up to allow local property developers to build affordable housing, particularly for key workers and for young people to remain or return to the island. Another suggestion was local control over tenancies to support objectives around demographics i.e. young people, families, key workers etc.

When considering how to run services and managing assets some attendees were clear that the public sector should take both a business approach and share resources with community organisations to ensure collaboration, and where initiatives fail, communities should be involved in finding solutions.

More should be done by all parties to engage better with young people to create a more attractive place for young people to live.

A common theme was to increase opportunities within the public sector for remote working (i.e. online) to support rural living. Naturally this means improved broadband which was recognised across the room as needing to be better on Mull.

One attendee expressed a concern with what appears to be a downsizing of the public sector and its reducing capability to deliver services and in extreme circumstances may create a single point of failure i.e. unable to deliver when posts are vacant. The challenge of attracting and retaining key workers in rural and island locations was a common theme recognised and this impacts on the ability of public bodies to deliver the services they would wish in the way they would wish.

There again was a common view from some that the council should operate more as a business and more efforts should be made to increase income whilst reducing costs. There should be increased opportunity for income to be generated locally (e.g. tourism tax) to be spent/invested locally. One suggested commercial undertaking is the training of bus drivers as there is market failure on our islands resulting in a shortage of bus drivers.

From a business perspective the council should recognise the asset value in Tobermory and wider Mull and invest in it accordingly. The iconic image of Tobermory is used shamelessly for promotion yet the town railings haven't been invested in in years and are now considered dangerous.

With regards to local council elected members, some attendees were of the view that the current multi member wards system does not work for islands and the community would much prefer an island (Mull) council or operate as an island authority.

With regards to the health and the welfare of our community, a number of attendees would like a permanent GP and more provision for our elderly to keep them on island for longer or until end of life. There should also be more awareness of mental health services available to residents. Any commissioning of health services should involve the services of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to ensure satisfactory standards are being applied.

To summarise key points raised: one size does not fit all and local solutions are best for local issues. Mull has a high capacity to deliver for its communities and the public sector cannot get in the way of this and instead should consider how powers and resources could be redistributed to support community development.

The public sector must do better when consulting and consider the impact of their decisions on our islands.

Despite the mixed views on accountability, one consensus is that it starts and ends with good communications.

## **Appendix 3**

### **THE BIG LISTEN Future of Public Services – Your Voice What You Said in Oban 21 June 2018**

Twenty people turned out at the Corran Halls and key themes that emerged over the evening were one size does not fit all, a changing role for community councils, the growing role of third sector, need for the public sector organisations to improve engagement, more autonomy for local committees and increased community participation in co-design of services.

When exploring the first theme about contributing to decision making, one attendee highlighted that there is no single [dominant] population centre in Argyll and Bute. The council centre is in Lochgilphead and in Oban, one can feel that decisions are made 'for us' by people who don't work in Oban. Line managers of staff are often elsewhere and again provide a perception that things are done 'to us' rather than 'by us' and 'for us'.

As in most events, the role and purpose of community councils was discussed at length. At one group there was a general consensus that in the Oban area, Councillors (elected members of Argyll and Bute Council) are good at attending community council meetings where issues are raised therefore presents a positive line of communication between elected representatives of communities (i.e. between community councillors as representatives of communities and elected members as representatives of the council).

The question asked was do community councils have the capacity to canvas community opinion in the wider sense? If not, can this be resourced? The answer to this question was not known and the concern was that a community councillor may articulate a position that does not accurately reflect local opinion. Some attendees felt that greater community engagement is required from community councils.

Nonetheless, it was noted that community councils can find it difficult to get people involved unless there is a specific issue which motivates them to get involved. It can be difficult to get some national bodies e.g. Transport Scotland to engage with communities, or when they do engage, communities can feel issues have not been taken on board.

One attendee suggested that community councils could use social media more as some people can find it difficult to find out what's going on. This can complement the use of traditional noticeboards etc. Increased communication would engage people more and give more weight to the voice of the community council.



With regard to public sector consultation, some attendees feel these can be presented as tokenistic and that the decision has effectively already been taken. It was also suggested that the outcome of consultations are not made public. One attendee suggested that it would be helpful to view responses to consultations by other community groups to better understand why certain decisions have been made (e.g. if the majority of people proposed an alternative view).

Questions were asked about how the public sector reaches the 'harder to reach' elements of our community including elderly people. There was a suggestion that the public sector needs to get out to where the community is and not simply expect people to come to a public meeting.

A direct link was made to considering the effectiveness of current arrangements for making decisions. One attendee was of the view that these are not effective because people are not sufficiently engaged. An example of a real situation was then provided as evidence of failure of existing arrangements. However, an elected member at the same table felt that in relation to that specific issue, consultation had been thorough and explained that multiple views are often expressed and can result in some people feeling the final decision doesn't reflect their views.

When considering community control over any services, at one focus group the first suggestion was that communities should start with something small and achievable that is easier for communities to deliver e.g. litter picking and grass cutting at a local space.

The second suggestion was that there are lots of local services that could be localised or be taken over by not-for-profit organisations and in a manner/ trading environment that is less pressured than current public sector arrangements allowing third sector organisations more time, space and flexibility to grow the service.

This led to a number of open questions starting with the all-important subject of budgets. If communities take over services, how is that resourced? Does the budget transfer with the service and would they be protected from future reductions? One attendee felt that council cuts have gone beyond where efficiencies can be made. Another attendee was of the view that council budgets should not be cut. The Scottish Government has protected some budgets which results in lower budgets in other areas.

Other questions that followed included; what is the existing skills, knowledge and capacity within the community? Volunteer fatigue was cited as a very real concern. Could community control remove procurement requirements? Would community groups be bound by the same regulations that the public sector is, like procurement?

One attendee commented that if communities could bid directly for the funding then taking over services would be more viable. However, as pointed out by one attendee, communities are groups of people with a shared interest who don't necessarily reside within the same geographical area. Therefore there needs to be rules and transparency regarding how communities influence the development of projects and designing the rules / processes that will be applied.

If it isn't appropriate to have the community involved in the delivery of something e.g. a statutory service, it was suggested by an attendee that it would be appropriate for them to help design the process by which this would be done.

One attendee was of the view that the only solution was meaningful and sustainable partnerships between public sector organisations and community groups/ third sector. Central to this is the funding which needs to be delegated to the lowest local level of authority with certainty over a longer term (i.e. in excess of 3 years) to allow the community efforts to grow. It was acknowledged that no public body has certainty over a 3 year period at present.

At a separate focus group there was a clear sense of a low appetite for community responsibility over services with a particular concern over a fear of failure and/or accountability. One attendee was very concerned over the sustainability of community control over services whilst acknowledging, at the same time, there is a good care model in Appin.

Another attendee within the group was of the view that the third sector is already 'filling the gaps' where there has been a retreat of the welfare state. Whilst there are success stories of third sector/community working, these need to be shared more and being explicit as to why there are successful.

The discussion continued with a suggestion that it is for the public sector to advise on how they will increase public influence on decision making and ultimately facilitate increased community engagement. Many individuals and communities currently feel disengaged with the public sector and one way of making it more person centred is for senior officers to raise their profile on social media e.g. advise on local gritting schedules so local people can have real time information on what is a safety issue - keep it local!; social media allows for immediate responses from people with local knowledge and assist with coming up with local solutions for local issues.

This same focus group also appeared to be of a general consensus that the Oban Lorn and the Isles Area Committee should be afforded resources and have more autonomy to make decisions resulting in delivery of objectives at increased pace and more local accountability.

Not unusually there was a suggestion that this idea would see a welcome return to the 'old town council' model which would assist with dealing with the perception of a 'one size does not fit all' issue. A particular example was the application of (national) standards which does not take into account local factors and unique circumstances.

One attendee of this focus group suggested there are still inefficiencies in the public sector and that the co-design of services with community groups would accelerate public sector reform, engender transformation and improve outcomes.

Core social work e.g. child protection shouldn't be community controlled but could look at how community influences parts that aren't governed by statute. Communities can also support services e.g. early intervention, and should be able to call on the professional expertise of the public sector where communities don't have the skills and/or confidence.

With regards to questions of accountability, one attendee was of the opinion that scrutiny should be undertaken by service users but not to the point as one person stated where 'you end up with a whole load of people monitoring'.

When considering what public services could look like in 5 year time, the first response was the hope that public services are still in existence and the second is the provision of Universal Basic Income. Others would like to see more social housing, larger communities, more jobs and improved health of our ageing population.

At one focus group there was opposing views as to whether this improved health would result in savings over the longer term? One view is that healthier older people will still require social care, but would maximise the amount of healthy life that people can enjoy.

With regards to resources and assets, there was a number of suggestions not necessarily related including increased funding for the public sector, the introduction of a tourism tax, income raised locally retained for local expenditure, quicker transfer of surplus buildings (assets) to the third sector, greater sharing of resources within the public sector and greater outsourcing of services to the private sector.

For the public sector itself, improved services, improved engagement and communications with communities and the private sector, parity of esteem with the third sector and increase sustainable partnership working with communities.

One attendee suggested that the public sector be able to procure more goods locally and further suggested that central procurement systems do not always result in the cheapest price and can result in the public sector buying goods or services at a

higher price from a supplier out with the area.

Another attendee suggested that the role of community councils being made more attractive through delegation of greater powers and control. Specifically for local government it was suggested that elected members work full time with full time salaries to attract a younger generation which would change outlooks, there should be less politics whilst greater autonomy for area committees.

When pulling together the varying comments into a single summary, one overriding theme is localism. In this instance, it may start with the community councils which if empowered with new controls and capacity plus a requirement to undertake greater engagement with constituents to ensure accurate reflection of community feelings, the community council in theory could attract more councillors and have greater weight to their voice.

Parallel to this was the suggestion for the public sector to improve engagement with communities and the private sector and more importantly move away from tokenistic consultation and facilitate much greater opportunity for communities to genuinely influence the design and outcomes of services.

Similarly to community councils, it was suggested that Area Committees also be given greater controls including delegation of area budgets and increased autonomy. It is assumed that decisions would be quicker due to the removal of the need to defer decisions to central committees and in addition that the decisions would more accurately reflect local considerations.

Co-designed services could be delegated to Area Committee for approval after which and where appropriate, be outsourced to both private and third sector organisations on the assumption that sufficient budgets for a satisfactory period of time to provide certainty would provide local solutions to local issues and ultimately increased sustainability.

The above was a theoretical suggestion when combining varying views and comments from attendees. Whilst there was opposing views in many of the principles discussed, above all, whilst there was not a universal desire for greater community control over services, there did appear to be a general consensus for communities to have increased influence to ensure local solutions for local issues.

## **Appendix 4**

### **THE BIG LISTEN Future of Public Services – Your Voice What You Said via the Webchat 18 June 2018**

The online webchat was held on the 18 June 2018. Key themes to emerge from the conversation may be summarised as follows. A big challenge to communities is a sufficient local labour market to support employers and sufficient affordable housing. These two are interlinked not only to encourage young people to stay but also to increase in-migration into the area.

One participant was of the view that through small interventions, communities can make big differences which can play a key role in improving demographics. Examples included communities' development of care services for early years, supporting the maintenance of good health of residents as a preventative measure and the development of outreach services.

Other activities communities can participate in were suggested as including the provision of exercise facilities, eco/environmental issues, road safety, providing young people with a 'voice' and meals for the elderly if village halls had good community kitchens. However, one participant raised concerns over liabilities which discourages willing and enthusiastic residents to taking on public service activities and concerns they might be sued. 'Accountability' was viewed as a scary word as it puts people off voluntary activity which may need to be covered by codes of practice. Another contributor suggested a different view which was that this should not prohibit or curb community activities and can be dealt with by careful consideration of insurance and other measures.

This raised the suggestion of jargon free guidance and a help line to support communities in becoming empowered to 'take stuff on themselves' and utilise skills available from within the community. It was noted that there is existing guidance on the Council website in relation to community empowerment and could be a starting point.

The participants appeared to agree that, whilst there is enthusiasm for increasing community control with small interventions, communities would not want control over regulated activities but do want to increase influence. Looking ahead to 5 years' time, one participant suggested that the council should continue to be responsible for core activities (e.g. protection, security and emergency activities) surrounded by a softer outer ring that could be entirely outsourced to business and/or enabled by community partnerships delivering statutory services. All of this would hang on a core set of principles around 'livability' i.e. making the area attractive for young people and families. Added to this is measuring activity against

a 10 year impact plan and clear messages from the community on what shall be delivered and who shall do it.

One comment received was that success in maintaining community involvement is the evidence of results and a perception they are being listened to; this takes time and commitment. Key messages need to be embedded within the community. A separate comment was that people need to see the point of getting involved and understand that communities can collectively make lives better for themselves but that education is often required as people are unaware of possibilities.

The online webchat demonstrated a willingness by community representatives to engage in a dialogue on doing things differently that allows communities to be empowered in a measured manner to support improving outcomes for communities. Whether this is 'doing things for themselves' or increasing influence over more statutory activity, it requires an element of education to ensure everyone are aware of the opportunities that fit their circumstances, evidence of the benefits, and time and commitment.