

Democracy Matters – draft response from Argyll and Bute CPP

Action for CPP Management Committee

- There is a need to respond to this important consultation by 14 December.
- Our Development Day on 19 September 2018 provided an insight to how our CPP can best be developed. The Council’s engagement sessions on Democracy Matters also provide insight to key themes around democracy. Our response is informed by this. Consider and agree the response.
- This is not a Local Government Review and the ambit of the review covers all public bodies active in Argyll and Bute or whose decisions have an impact on the area.
- Individual organisations are also encouraged to respond directly to the consultation. The following seminars provide opportunity for further discussion and feedback and are for council members, officers and partners.

Glasgow	1pm, Wednesday 28 November, City Halls, Candleriggs	Book online
Inverness	1pm, Tuesday 4 December, Highland Council Offices (venue to be confirmed)	Book online
Perth	1pm, Wednesday 5 December, Perth and Kinross Council Offices, 2 High Street	Book online
Edinburgh	1pm, Monday 17 December, COSLA Offices, Haymarket	Book online
Aberdeen	1pm, Tuesday 18 December, Aberdeenshire Council Offices, Woodhill House	Book online

Draft Response for consideration and agreement.

The sections below highlight that Community Planning in Argyll and Bute is strong and has a known direction for continual improvement with a focus on stronger participation, awareness and commitment to action.

It highlights a need for investment in the capacity building of communities and partners.

Connection with Decision Making

There can be a sense of distance often felt by communities from organisations that take decisions about services that affect them. Some organisations are more recognisable to communities than others (e.g. the local council, police, fire and rescue or NHS) but others are largely unknown as is the means to influence their decision making yet their decisions can have a significant impact on communities.

The people and organisations working in our area do so from a huge range of organisations each with separate area remits – some national, some very local. Our Community Planning Partnership is the best forum to bring these organisations together to talk about Place – the place of Argyll and Bute - and how together we make that better.

Our connections between Local Area Groups and Management Committee support input to decision making.

There is a continuing need to promote the CPP and the way in which local people can be involved through area groups.

“One size does not fit all”

Within Argyll and Bute alone, there is a diversity of island, rural and urban communities and it is important that public bodies can accommodate and satisfy the diversity of their needs, aspirations and capacity.

Our CPP area plans reflect this by their different priorities for partnership working.

Our engagement, at point of creating actions within plans enables diversity of influence from local people.

Continued improvement in our engagement, and the monitoring and development of local area plans will further support the diversity of needs identified and actions taken.

Community Control

In the Councils engagement sessions many of the residents who took part appeared more interested in collaboration with local public bodies than having overall control of services. This was often characterised as the public body retaining the core functions as a provider and commissioner and continuing to consider opportunities for partnership working between community/ third sector groups and all spheres of government where there is an agreed and specific objective (i.e. local project or issue).

Our CPP has identified a need to re-shape its plans – strategic and local partnership plans – and this provides opportunity to establish the widest sense of partnership working to carry out the actions.

Challenges to partnership working and participation

In developing a more participative democracy which advocates more involvement of community organisations and individuals, feedback from the councils engagement events indicated that people want to be able to influence decisions taken about their services but there are perceived barriers to participation. These included time constraints (people are very busy and traditional arrangements for participation are time consuming); rurality and remoteness (attendance at meetings, transport or connectivity issues) and frustration that complex structures (of both public sector and community groups) ‘can get in the way’.

In the CPP’s Development Day partners identified that time, resources and geography of the area are challenges for efficient partnership working. This is especially where the actions are ‘adding value’ and ‘addressing gaps’ and may be bringing together those who do not normally work together to do something new.

The CPP is looking at ways to overcome these challenges within its existing structure and improve how local people and partners can best participate.

As part of this it is looking at best ways to recruit and support key positions in its structure such as chairs of area and strategic meetings, lead officers of thematic priority areas.

Community and Partnership Capacity

In carrying out community planning both communities and partnership working requires support to develop capacity and to participate. Community Development and Community Planning teams across public bodies have been impacted by the reduction in resources experienced over the last 10 years and this has paradoxically impacted on communities when they are being asked to step up in terms of their participation. There is a need for investment in the resource to support community planning.

Fiscal Empowerment

The results of the erosion of public service budgets has been expanding inequalities in our communities and an increased level of dispute over how reducing resources are distributed rather than the broader debate about how high quality public services are sustainably resourced.

The continued trend of one year budgets makes collaboration and committing to undertaking medium-long term projects difficult. Increased certainty of funding over longer periods and more support to Community Planning Partnerships to look how they may raise finances could allow for new opportunities for investment in our communities.

Background

COSLA and the Scottish Government jointly launched the Local Governance Review consultation on 28 May 2018; also known as 'Democracy Matters', the consultation will close 14 December 2018.

The consultation seeks to explore how decisions and their impacts are best taken at community level and review how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government, including national and regional public bodies.

It remains unknown at this stage what the proposed Local Democracy Bill will contain however it is anticipated that it has the potential to have:

- a) A long term impact on how decisions are made affecting our communities in Argyll and Bute and,
- b) Generate organisational or structural change or introduce the transfer of powers between or from spheres of government and communities.

Contact the team: democracymatters@gov.scot or 0131 244 0709

Find out more: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/local-governance-review/>