

# **Strengthening local democracy in Scotland: The Community Councils' perspective**

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Report from a participative forum with Community Councillors  
facilitated by the Academy of Government  
to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy



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## **Key recommendations by the forum**

These recommendations were generated and supported by 33 Community Councillors from 27 Local Authority Areas. Other ideas with varying levels of support are included throughout the report.

### **1. Regarding local democracy**

- Local democracy should be made more 'bottom-up', 'resident-led' and participative by finding new ways of involving citizens directly in policy and decision making.
- To strengthen local democracy, authorities should prioritise public engagement over traditional consultation. Although traditional consultations may be sometimes appropriate, the forum advocated moving towards new models of public engagement more based on dialogue and deliberation formats geared for collaborative policy-making and creative problem-solving.
- Nonetheless, traditional consultations may still sometimes be necessary, but the way they are carried out should be greatly improved. In particular, participants insisted that there is need for transparency in how consultations inform decision-making. They argued that much of the cynicism surrounding traditional consultation could be diminished by ensuring that decisions are clearly explained in relation to consultation responses: What was taken onboard and why? What wasn't and why?
- Developing effective and meaningful collaboration between Local Authorities and Community Councils should be a key part of building a vibrant local democracy and achieving better outcomes for local communities. Participants noted that this might require substantial changes in their current relationship. On the one hand, they argued, public officials must improve their understanding and support of community engagement, and the role that Community Councils can play in it. On the other, they recognised that Community Councils must improve the way they work and represent their communities, so that they can take a more substantial role in partnership with Local Authorities, and as mediators of broader citizen participation in their communities.

### **2. Regarding Community Councils**

- Forum participants argued that Community Councils should strive to sustain ongoing communication and networking with public and third sector organisations in order to develop effective collaboration and capacity for local problem-solving. However, they noted, it is crucial that those organisations are also willing to engage in open dialogue.
- To enhance legitimacy and accountability in Community Councils, forum participants suggested that there should be a concerted

effort, by Local Authorities and Community Councils, to have genuine elections and increase voting turnout.

- Participants also argued that Community Councils should become more diverse and inclusive, and their composition should better reflect the demographic characteristics and the diversity of perspectives of the communities they serve.
- To achieve more diverse and inclusive Community Councils, participants insisted that their public profile needs to be raised so that there is broader appreciation of, and contribution to, their work.
- Participants also argued that Community Councils should be supported to improve the way they involve communities in shaping their agenda and setting priorities for their local areas. This may be achieved by combining ongoing face-to-face forums using new formats of facilitated dialogue and deliberation, with online platforms to increase broader engagement and impact.
- Participants noted that the ideas above depend on Community Councils being provided with adequate training, capacity building, support and funding:
  - *Training.* They suggested that there is considerable scope to improve the consistency and breadth of training opportunities for CCs to develop knowledge and skills regarding:
    - strategic policy issues;
    - planning legislation;
    - public finance;
    - online tools: websites, blogs, social media;
    - securing funding for projects from local, national and international funding sources;
    - community own assets and community empowering mechanisms (e.g. local development trusts);
    - and public engagement (e.g. facilitation and mediation skills and techniques; designing interactive forums for dialogue and deliberation).
  - *Capacity building* depends not only on adequate training, but also on building Community Councils' capacity to deal with the workload associated with their current role, for instance, in planning and/or in Community Planning. To address this, participants suggested that Community Councils might need staff support, as well as new members, so that responsibilities can be better shared. As the forum made clear, it should not be forgotten that they are volunteers giving up considerable time. Any reforms should carefully consider what level of commitment might be realistically expected.

- *Support and funding.* All forum participants agreed that Community Councils need adequate support in kind by Local Authorities (e.g. staff support, venues, administration). They also suggested that there might be a case for devolved budgets to those Community Councils who are prepared to manage them. Such budgets would enable Community Councils to develop relevant local projects. They could also be used to employ staff to service Community Councils and increase their capacity for broader community engagement and networking.
- Participants advocated the need for reform that empowers Community Councils through national legislation, which could include formalising their integration within Local Authority structures. Therefore, the challenge here is for Scottish Government and Local Authorities to develop policies that empower Community Councils to a level that enables them to fulfil a substantial role in a more vibrant local democracy.
- Nonetheless, the forum insisted that national reforms should bear in mind the varied level of aspiration and capacity across Community Councils in Scotland. For instance, rural and urban Community Councils may have different needs in this regard. The challenge will be to generate reforms that strike a balance between flexibility and consistency. That is, flexibility in terms of allowing Community Councils to shape their work according to their local priorities and aspirations; and consistency in terms of ensuring that all citizens across Scotland can benefit from a robust local Community Council through which they may channel their participation in local affairs.

## **Recommendations by the author**

Since the priority of this report is to reflect the participants' views, here I only outline my suggestions. For a fuller explanation please see the final section of the report.

- Combining elections with selection by lot, in order to form diverse and inclusive Community Councils.
- Removing barriers to broader participation in Community Councils.
- Developing Community Councillors as facilitators of public dialogue and deliberation.
- Recasting Community Councillors as delegates rather than representatives.
- Rolling out a comprehensive training program covering not only topical areas but also process skills.
- Creating a national Community Councils Best Practice Network.
- Allocating adequate support and resources to turn CCs into effective institutions of participatory democracy.

## Background

On 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, 33 Community Councillors from 27 Local Authority Areas met in Edinburgh for a facilitated forum on how to strengthen local democracy in Scotland. Please see Annex 4 for the full list of participants.

The forum was facilitated by the author of this report. The purpose was to articulate the Community Councils' perspective in order to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy. For information on the Commission please follow the link:

<http://www.localdemocracy.info>

## Forum format

The forum was designed to maximise inclusion of every participant, including those who may be less inclined to speak in public or prefer other means of sharing their views. This was done through a combination of small table discussions and plenary sessions, and based on both individual work reflected on the coloured-coded cards produced by participants, as well as group work comprising the prioritisation of key points at each table.

The forum programme is included in Annex 1. The table facilitators were recruited from amongst the participants, and provided with a brief (see Annex 3) detailing the facilitation approach and the format used for each session.



## About this report

Sections 1-3 outline themes and points prioritised by Community Councillors at the forum, whereas section 4 includes my commentary and suggestions.

Most points included in sections 1-3 were broadly supported at the forum, unless stated otherwise. That means that I have focussed on themes and issues where participants agreed, and the format of the forum allowed checking for consensus or disagreement. For the full

transcription of the points made by participants please see Annex 2. The draft report was sent to all participants for feedback before being sent to the Commission.

### Acronyms

LAA – Local Authority Area

LAs – Local Authorities

CC – Community Council

CCs – Community Councils

Please note that **'single inverted commas'** indicate words and sentences taken verbatim from forum participants.

Of course, not all points reflected in the report will be relevant to everyone because there is considerable variation between CCs – especially from rural to urban areas, as forum participants emphasised. That variation means that while some CCs struggle with certain issues, others thrive on them (e.g. involving communities; securing funding for projects; collaborating with LAs).

The forum comprised three sessions, each including group work and plenary deliberation, and organised around three questions:

- What is the Community Councils' vision for local democracy?
- What are the current problems and challenges?
- What are the potential solutions and reforms?

The following sections present key findings from these three sessions.



## **Introduction: Why Community Councils matter**

There are around 1,200 Community Councils in Scotland, legislated in 1973 as an innovative form of grassroots democracy. As the Scottish Government website explains:

*“Community Councils are the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland. They bridge the gap between local authorities and communities, and help to make public bodies aware of the opinions and needs of the communities they represent.”<sup>1</sup>*

Accordingly, Community Councils are intended to be the most local tier of Scottish democracy, and yet, after 40 years, in many localities their potential as a key vehicle for citizen participation remains unfulfilled<sup>2</sup>.

Scotland has some of the largest Local Authority Areas in Europe and, as Keating points out, it features “the largest average population per basic unit of local government in any developed country”<sup>3</sup>. This has led some observers to argue that Scottish local democracy is practically inexistent<sup>4</sup>.

This context highlights the importance of developing effective, vibrant and diverse Community Councils capable of channelling inclusive citizen participation at local level.

As this report illustrates, Community Councillors don't lack aspiration, vision or capacity to be self-critical, to map out challenges and problems, and to propose solutions and reforms.

### **1. A vision for a vibrant local democracy**

When forum participants were asked to generate a vision for local democracy from a CCs perspective, they contributed dozens of ideas and arguments collected in Annex 2. Most of those contributions can be grouped in six themes:

1. Making local democracy more participative by involving citizens in policy and decision making.
2. Developing effective collaboration between Local Authorities and Community Councils.
3. Developing vibrant, diverse and inclusive Community Councils.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/communitycouncils](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/communitycouncils) [Accessed 21 April 2013]

<sup>2</sup> This is illustrated in various reviews and publications (Scottish Office, 1999; Community Council Short Life Working Group, 2012; Scottish Government, 2013; Thomson *et al.*, 2012; Bort *et al.*, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Keating (2010: 28).

<sup>4</sup> See Bort *et al.* (2012).

4. Improving how Community Councils work.
5. Raising the profile of Community Councils.
6. Finding new ways of supporting and funding Community Councils.

**Theme 1** proposes a vision of local democracy in which **every citizen has opportunities for direct involvement in policy and decision making processes**. Forum participants insisted that local democracy should be 'bottom up', that is, 'resident led' in order to reflect 'the needs of the people'. In order to foster this quality of participation, local communities should have 'the resource, knowledge and opportunity to access and influence macro and local decisions'.

**Theme 2** proposes that a stronger local democracy requires **effective collaboration between LAs and CCs**. Although forum participants recognised that fruitful collaboration already takes place in some LAAs, they emphasised that in many others there is much room for improvement. For instance, some insisted in the need for 'sharing responsibility' (i.e. 'stewardship of common good funds and assets') and enhancing 'collaboration over implementing decisions'. Others emphasised that this requires a 'sensible level of support from the LA', so that CCs can engage in 'more and better dialogue with Council officials'. The aim here is to develop a culture of 'two-way conversation' rather than a 'tick-box culture'.

**Theme 3** recognises that for CCs to effectively collaborate with LAs, as well as function as channels for citizen participation, **CCs must become more vibrant, diverse and inclusive**. Accordingly, participants emphasised that CCs must strive to achieve 'meaningful representation' of the communities they serve. That means 'demographically equal representation' according to key categories such as 'age, gender and social group'.

**Theme 4** proposes that for CCs to become a key institution in a more vibrant local democracy, they must **improve the way they work**. Accordingly, the participants argued for CCs with 'clearly defined objectives' and 'improved communication' with statutory services, communities and the third sector. Enhancing CCs 'accountability' by conducting 'genuine elections' was also part of this vision, as well as improving their effectiveness by developing appropriate training and perhaps some 'Key Performance Indicators'.

**Theme 5** highlights that this vision for more vibrant CCs in a revitalised local democracy would require **raising their public profile and esteem**. This would entail, as two participants put it, 'improving the visibility of our work' and 'strengthening our voice'. In turn, this might increase general 'respect' for their contribution, as well as 'recognition from LAs that CCs have positive ideas to share for the benefit of all'.

Finally, **Theme 6** includes considerations about the **support and funding needed** to realise the different dimensions of the vision outlined above. However, this was a topic in which participants had diverse views. Some advocated better support in kind (e.g. training, staff), whereas others emphasised the need for 'local budgets' and new sources of funding (e.g. Scottish Government). A few participants also proposed that funding for legal challenges might be desirable.

## **2. Current problems and challenges**

After sketching a vision, forum participants worked together to map out challenges and problems that stand in the way. They shared numerous points collected in Annex 2. Most can be grouped in 5 themes:

1. Problems and challenges regarding citizen participation in local policy and decision making.
2. Problems and challenges regarding how local government works.
3. Problems and challenges regarding how Community Councils work.
4. Challenges regarding recruitment, diversity and inclusion in Community Councils.
5. Challenges related to the current standing of Community Councils and their relationship with Local Authorities.

**Theme 1** includes the participants' **concerns regarding the involvement of citizens in policy and decision making**. For instance, many argued that there is a lack of 'meaningful consultation' and 'transparent decision making', and that often 'officials make decisions with no reference to local opinion' or without 'engaging the whole community'. This would require 'not consultation but engagement/dialogue through the process'. Some wondered whether it would be desirable to use 'tribunals as a means of settling a grievance as opposed to going along ombudsman route –i.e. holding authorities to account if consultation fails'. Others lamented that too often the 'voluntary sector voice is not heard'. Yet others blamed a lack of knowledge by officials on how to carry out public engagement.

**Theme 2** is concerned with **problems regarding how local government works**. Here some participants worried about excessive centralisation (i.e. 'Scottish Government control not LA control) as well as lack of accountability by LAs (i.e. 'nobody carries the can in many local councils when things go wrong'). Others emphasised that the challenge was 'culture change in local government', given that often it works 'top down when it should be bottom up', which led some to advocate a more 'hands-off approach by LAs'. Yet, for others the key problem is to ensure that 'all services provided are shared as fairly as possible', and deciding sensibly 'what to cut' when trying to reduce LA

budgets. Finally, some highlighted the 'isolation of rural communities geographically, socially' and in terms of services, perhaps a consequence of their considerable distance to local government institutions given the large size of LAAs.

However, forum participants did not only focus on mapping out problems in how local democracy and local government work. They were also self-critical and dedicated considerable effort to consider **problems in CCs**. Accordingly, in **Theme 3**, they prioritised issues such as the lack of clear mission statements in some CCs and the lack of 'Key Performance Indicators when evaluating whether the group is fit for purpose'. Some emphasised their struggles to secure 'funding to deal with local issues'. Others pointed out that some CCs do not interact enough with other organisations and networks (i.e. housing associations, schools, councillors), and sometimes lack strategic understanding of social and policy issues. Various challenges regarding internal operations were also outlined, for instance, ensuring 'continuity', 'enforcing rules', recording 'how individual councillors vote', maintaining 'motivation', fostering productive 'team work' and coping with 'paperwork' and 'form filling'. Recognising that 'community empowerment requires skills', they also highlighted the lack of comprehensive 'ongoing training' and 'support' for CCs.

Continuing in a self-critical manner, in **Theme 4**, participants dedicated considerable thought to the **challenges of improving diversity and inclusion in CCs**. The key difficulties are to achieve 'more youth involvement' and to attract 'the right people', that is, those who want to get involved and have time and perhaps 'ability' and 'experience'. Some participants blamed 'apathy' and 'disinterest in local affairs', while others recognised that 'good people are too busy already'. Part of the challenge is also that 'CCs often have bad reputation'.

This last point links to **Theme 5**, which is about challenges regarding the current **public standing of CCs and their relationship to LAAs**. Many participants observed that the 'value of CCs is questioned' and, perhaps as a consequence, they feel that they are not 'being listened to' nor 'taken seriously'. In particular, some insisted that in some areas 'team work is lacking between CCs and LAAs', and that their relationships are often 'inconsistent'. For others, the problem goes beyond lack of collaboration, and entails the absence of 'appetite in LAAs to empower CCs' resulting in a 'lack of devolved authority from LAAs to CCs'.

This made some participants question the role of CCs in the current institutional landscape: 'How do we fit into the LA structure?' Some of these issues seem aggravated by the challenge of 'satisfying disparate needs of small vs. huge local populations'. In addition, many pointed out their struggles to fulfil their role in planning processes. Consequently, some lamented the absence of a 'right of appeal against council decisions on planning issues' supported by 'funding if requiring legal representation'.

All in all, some pointed out that the challenges and problems outlined above were somewhat accentuated by the ‘uncertainty about the future’ of CCs, including their ‘existence, responsibilities and funding’.

### 3. Potential solutions and reforms

By the time we finished the session above, forum participants were buzzing with ideas on how to try and resolve some of these issues. The final part of the forum was dedicated to harness that energy and collate a range of proposals for solutions and reforms concerning CCs and local democracy more broadly. They can be grouped in 5 themes:

1. *Community Councils and Local Authorities working together to achieve better outcomes*
2. *Improving how Community Councils work*
3. *Ensuring public awareness, and improving esteem, of Community Councils*
4. *Potential for initiatives and reforms at national level*
5. *Improving local democracy by prioritising engagement over consultation, and by making consultation more meaningful*

**Theme 1** emphasises the participants’ view that to solve many of the issues outlined earlier will require **CCs and LAs to develop new ways of working together to achieve better outcomes for local communities**. Although most participants acknowledged having ongoing working relationships with LAs, not everyone qualified those relationships as productive. Nonetheless, participants accepted that to ‘establish CCs as a functional partner in LA operations’ would require building CCs capacity on various fronts. For instance, participants proposed that LAs provide ‘better resources to promote engagement and support CCs’, as well as a range of training opportunities (e.g. legislation, finance).

By the same token, it was suggested that there should also be ‘appropriate training for senior Council officials’ so that they understand public engagement and their new role in a more participative local democracy. Building the capacity of both CCs and LAs to develop collaborative policy and decision making is therefore crucial. However, many insisted that is not only about training but also about culture change amongst officials who are sometimes reticent to engage in dialogue with CCs, communities and citizens. Accordingly, participants prioritised the need to change mindsets so that LAs and public services ‘recognise and use the amazing human resource and experience that exists in CCs’ in order to improve local ‘problem-solving’ and foster community creativity. A participant offered an example of best practice in Carrick, where collaborative work between CCs and LA secured substantial external funding ‘to run a tourism project to bring wealth to our area’. Finally, there were also

suggestions to improve CCs/LAs relationships by enabling 'Community Council Federations to have a greater input' into LA work. Moreover, some argued that a more productive relationship between CCs and LAs might be a first step for making Community Planning Partnerships more relevant locally.

Nevertheless, participants conceded that for CCs to play a more prominent role in local government and local democracy **CCs must considerably improve the way they work**. That is the gist of **Theme 2**, which is one of the largest, clearly signalling CCs' self-awareness and ability to be self-critical in order to find solutions. Consequently, under this theme they offered various options and proposals for improvement:

- **Elections and accountability.** Participants prioritised to 'actively encourage nominations for CC seats to improve credibility'. Some argued that this would 'increase accountability' perhaps leading to 'fairer decisions so that we have greater turnout'. It was also suggested that it might be useful to 'record and publish every councillor's voting and attendance record'.
- **Networking.** Participants insisted on the importance of CCs interacting regularly with 'local schools, housing agencies, senior council officers, police, etc' and therefore develop 'networking at every level' as well as inviting representatives to meetings. Some argued that 'fetes and galas' can enhance networking and community building, and others highlighted the need for better 'networking facilities for CCs and communities'.
- **Engagement.** Participants also prioritised that CCs develop 'increased and effective use of social media –Facebook, Twitter– to increase community engagement. Furthermore, they proposed that CCs carry out better public engagement forums in their local communities in order to involve citizens in determining priorities for their areas. This, in their view, would improve 'demographic representation' in the work of CCs and potentially 'attract more prospective community councillors'.
- **Workload.** In order to improve capacity for networking and engagement, participants argued that it may be necessary to make their 'workload more manageable' regarding other aspects of CCs work. This might be achieved through more support by LAs, but perhaps also through more involvement in CCs activity by the communities and citizens they serve. Part of achieving a reduction in workload may also be, as some participants proposed, to 'set realistic goals' and 'be realistic in what we can achieve'.
- **Training.** Although in some LAs there are training schemes in place, participants reiterated the need for better training 'at all levels' on 'skills and procedures required in CCs'.

- **National and local CCs associations.** Some participants argued that one of the potential mechanisms to drive change along these dimensions might be to ‘develop an effective national Scottish + local CCs organisation/association offering training, advice, research, information and to facilitate networking’.

As a result of improvements in the areas above, some argued that ‘better quality CCs will lead to better partnership working with LAs’. However, achieving some of these changes will greatly depend on **ensuring public awareness, and improving esteem, of CCs** –which is the basis for **Theme 3**. Here the proposed solution is to ‘raise the profile’ and ‘change the image’ of CCs by ‘explaining the role of CCs to local residents’ in order to foster ‘respect and appreciation of the potential of CCs’. This could be done through ‘general publicity’, for instance producing ‘local newsletters funded by LAs’. Another proposal, based on some already existing initiatives, is to ‘form formally recognised young people’s CCs to widen the age range and commitment’. In terms of finding new ways of recognising the CCs’ contribution, a participant proposed the ‘Huddersfield model of valuing –e.g. £10 million of free time’.

**Theme 4** includes considerations and proposals for **initiatives and reforms at national level** along 3 dimensions:

- **Budgets.** Forum participants agreed on the desirability of CCs having ‘devolved budgets’, but only ‘if they want it’. The key is to ‘make sure the resources match the ambition and the role’. Accordingly, some proposed that CCs get a realistic budget so that they can ‘employ someone to work for them’. The forum didn’t specify the desirable source for that funding. For some, CCs ‘should have a strong budget from the Scottish Government’. Others simply insisted on the need for more funding as well as on the premise that ‘all CCs should be treated the same by their LA’. Nonetheless, some participants emphasised that other kinds of support are as necessary as funding (e.g. training, venues, support by LA staff). In addition, others argued that CCs should also improve their capacity to collaborate with others in order to secure ad hoc funding for projects (i.e. the Carrick example).

Therefore, the challenge here is to create a funding system that supports all CCs fairly across Scotland, but is also flexible to accommodate the diverse levels of aspiration across CCs.

- **Empowering CCs.** Participants prioritised the need for ‘reform at national level to empower CCs through national legislation’, which could include ‘formalising CCs within LA structure’. This empowerment was seen as a crucial step in order to attract new participants to CCs. Some forum participants also emphasised ‘community right to buy’ as a key mechanism for empowerment through the generation of income. Others advocated for a ‘consistent approach to representation on common good funds’. A

number of participants thought that resolving the problems that they outlined regarding planning processes may require a 'root and branch review of planning law'. More broadly, one participant suggested the introduction of a 'judicial process to adjudicate where the LA cannot be held to account', and pointed out that this would require funding for legal support.

Therefore, the challenge here is for the Scottish Government and LAs to put in place measures that empower CCs to a level that enables them to fulfil their role.

- *Rural and urban areas.* Forum participants also emphasised that any reforms should take into account that the needs of different areas may vary considerably. Accordingly, participants prioritised the point that any restructuring of CCs should 'reflect the differences between rural, urban and city areas to better represent their respective memberships with delegation of appropriate powers'. At the forum, there was a sense that some rural CCs felt more empowered than some of their urban counterparts. Consequently, some CCs seemed very active in collaborating with LAs, securing funds, developing projects, managing community own assets, and engaging broadly with their communities, whereas others struggled to develop that kind of work. Research may be needed to understand whether the rural/urban split is actually a key factor in such differentiation amongst CCs.

Finally, **Theme 5** includes a broader area of interest where the forum achieved a clear consensus, namely: the need to **improve local democracy by prioritising engagement over consultation, and by making consultation more meaningful**. Let's take both dimensions in turn:

- *Meaningful consultation.* The forum saw traditional consultation as necessary, but argued that the way it often works can be greatly improved. In particular, there was consensus on the need for transparency in how consultations are connected to decision-making. In other words, ensuring that decisions are clearly explained in relation to consultation responses could diminish the cynicism surrounding traditional consultation. Forum participants articulated this point as follows: 'Councils must either accept majority view on any consultation response or provide detailed and reasoned explanation [of why they didn't] individually at public meetings'.
- *Prioritise engagement over consultation.* Although traditional consultations may be sometimes appropriate, the forum agreed on the need to move towards new models of public engagement more based on dialogue and deliberation formats geared for collaborative policy-making and creative problem-solving. Such formats would entail 'adequate representation bottom-up' to ensure 'demographic equal representation' according to the forum's vision for more

inclusive and diverse citizen participation in local democracy. A participant suggested that interactive formats and facilitation techniques such as the ones used in this forum could be used more often (by LAs and CCs) in order to generate ideas, map problems, and discuss 'focussed solutions to bring people together'. Another participant emphasised that in order to improve public engagement the 'media need to be better reporting local issues'.

All in all, forum participants were clearly minded that reforms will be necessary in order to develop a more vibrant local democracy, as well as to improve how CCs work so that they may contribute more substantially. Some participants were concerned about whether national and local governments may be willing to adopt such an ambitious level of reforms. Others argued that when CCs are not working, 'rather than disband a CC' citizens and authorities should work together to 'find a solution'. For, as other participants put it, if CCs disappear, 'don't we deny residents of a democratic right?'

For a summary of overall recommendations from the forum please refer to the Key Recommendations section at the start of this report.



#### **4. Coda: Author's suggestions for turning Community Councils into institutions of participatory democracy**

At the end of the forum I asked participants whether they would like me to also include my views in the report. The response was affirmative, so this concluding section adds my reflections on how CCs could be reformed to play a more meaningful role in a more participative local democracy.

Many of the points made during the forum echo the findings from some of the limited research and work carried out on CCs in the last few years<sup>5</sup>. For instance, the low level of contested elections<sup>6</sup> seems problematic for an institution of representative democracy, and erodes the legitimacy claims of CCs. They also often struggle to attract a diversity of participants, and often lack capacity to involve broad sections of their communities in setting local priorities.

That is why perhaps the most novel finding from the forum –with respect to previous reports– is the participants' insistence in the need to foster new forms of public engagement through dialogue and deliberation formats. In this section, I offer some proposals on how this might be achieved. But first let me share some thoughts on what I think makes it difficult for CCs to fulfil a more prominent democratic role.

Interestingly, CCs in Scotland share challenges with similar institutions in other countries<sup>7</sup>. I would argue that the problem is that they have been modelled as institutions of representative democracy rather than as institutions of participatory democracy. As such, they suffer from the same malaises that affect representative democracy more broadly, namely: low electoral turnout, public cynicism and disaffection, increasing lack of legitimacy and so on<sup>8</sup>.

As a result, in my opinion, Community Councils can feel sometimes placed in an ambiguous limbo. On the one hand, when some authorities and public services are content with the contribution of CCs, they seem to happily see them as a legitimate vehicle for ticking the community engagement box. On the other hand, when CCs play a more challenging role in policy and decision making processes, those very same authorities and public services seem quick to dismiss them as illegitimate and unrepresentative on the basis of some of the problems outlined in this report. It seems unfair that sometimes Community Councils have to operate in such an uncomfortable limbo: considered legitimate community voices when it's convenient, and deemed illegitimate challengers when it's not.

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance Community Council Short Life Working Group (2012), CCWG-Secretariat (2012), Ryan and Cruikshank (2012), and Scottish Government (2013).

<sup>6</sup> See Scottish Government (2013: 23).

<sup>7</sup> For instance 'neighborhood councils' in the USA (see Leighninger, 2006: 3-4, 9).

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Stoker (2006), POWER (2006) and Hansard Society (2012).

In turn, this situation seems to feed a vicious circle: CCs are often not given more power and responsibilities because they can be deemed unrepresentative of the citizens they serve, while citizens often don't get involved in CC business because they see them as lacking power and impact. There is no easy way of breaking this vicious circle. Can CCs legitimately claim more power when they lack diversity, inclusiveness and capacity for broad community engagement? And can it realistically be expected that a diverse range of citizens will volunteer their time and energy to an institution that they may see as lacking relevance? So what should come first? Increasing their relevance through empowerment that may attract participation, or making them relevant through inclusive participation that may lead to empowerment? Probably both dimensions should be tackled simultaneously.

So how can we turn CCs into institutions of participatory democracy fit for the purpose of collaborative policy and decision-making? I would like to offer seven proposals.

### **1. Combining elections with selection by lot**

To improve diversity and inclusion, the composition of CCs could be determined by combining both electoral contests and selection by lot. Selection by lot has been historically used as one of the most democratic means of selection for public service because everyone has an equal chance of being chosen<sup>9</sup>. This can be done by using social science sampling techniques to select candidates randomly from the relevant constituency.

This idea is based on international experiences using 'mini-publics', Mini-publics<sup>10</sup> were proposed decades ago by political scientist Robert Dahl, who envisioned a sort of *mini-populus* demographically representative of the population and empowered to learn and deliberate on public issues, and to contribute directly to decision-making. Mini-publics are designed to avoid some of the trappings of party politics and technocratic policy-making.

The use of mini-publics has increased notably in the last decade<sup>11</sup>, and the variety of democratic innovations that are emerging based on this idea is remarkable: from the American Citizens' Jury, to the German Planning Cell, the Danish Consensus Conference, or the Citizens' Assemblies in Canada, Iceland or Netherlands. Mini-publics are formed by randomly selected citizens (for instance, selected by lot from the electoral roll), sometimes using quotas to ensure certain social characteristics, e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Mini-publics are empowered to call in a diversity of 'witnesses' to provide evidence and

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<sup>9</sup> On the democratic role of selection by lot see Carson and Martin (1999) and Stone (2012).

<sup>10</sup> On mini-publics see Elstub and Escobar (2013).

<sup>11</sup> See Smith (2009).

arguments on a given issue. Finally, mini-publics engage in dialogue and deliberation before agreeing recommendations or decisions. There are many elements from the composition and format of mini-publics that could be borrowed for a reform of CCs.

In particular, using selection by lot, alongside elections, could bring new voices and perspectives into Community Councils, therefore making them more diverse and democratically robust.

## **2. Removing barriers to broader participation**

There should be research into the barriers that prevent people from getting involved in Community Councils. Some of them seem apparent. Volunteering requires considerable time and energy, and not everyone can afford it –i.e. citizens who are full time carers or have childcare obligations. Accordingly, if we are going to be serious about removing barriers, there should be funding and resources to make participation in CCs a levelled playing field.

Furthermore, from my own research<sup>12</sup> I have learned that citizens are often put off by the rituals that characterise certain public meetings. In my view, there is considerable room to make CCs meetings more engaging by using interactive formats and a range of facilitation techniques<sup>13</sup>.

Of course, lowering access barriers and improving meetings will not have much impact unless the work of CCs is properly publicised. Accordingly, resources should be invested to put in place communication strategies using a range of traditional media and new online platforms. In particular, the potential for using websites and social media is immense<sup>14</sup>, and it's more likely to reach social groups that are often absent in CCs –i.e. young people.

## **3. Developing Community Councillors as facilitators of public dialogue and deliberation**

In their new role as part of an institution of participatory democracy, Community Councillors would become key facilitators and mediators of inclusive public dialogue and deliberation<sup>15</sup> in their communities. This means that they should be capable of organising and facilitating public forums that creatively involve a wide and diverse range of citizens in setting priorities for their local area and contributing to problem-solving. The role of a facilitator is to help participants to have constructive dialogue and deliberation, and this would require that Community Councillors adopt an impartial mediation approach.

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<sup>12</sup> See Escobar (2011).

<sup>13</sup> See for instance IAP2 (2006), Acland (2012), NCDD (2010) and Faulkner (2011).

<sup>14</sup> See Ryan and Cruickshank (2012).

<sup>15</sup> On facilitation, public dialogue and deliberation see Escobar (2011).

This means that their role would be not so much to come up with initiatives and solutions on their own, as to help residents to co-produce their own initiatives and solutions through participatory forums. Accordingly, Community Councillors would become catalysers for democratic participation and collaborative problem-solving in their local areas. As such, they could play key roles in developing, in collaboration with LAs, innovative processes such as Participatory Budgeting (PB). In its most ambitious form, as practiced in some Brazilian and European cities<sup>16</sup>, PB is a process that enables citizens and communities to decide on the allocation of substantial public expenditure after considered learning, dialogue and deliberation.

#### **4. Recasting Community Councillors as delegates rather than representatives**

Strengthened by the mandate given by robust participatory forums, Community Councillors would act more as delegates than as representatives. This means that their role would be to take the views and proposals articulated by their communities to official policy and decision making processes. In my view, the contribution of CCs to official processes would carry more weight if they were backed in this way by broad and inclusive participation locally. Arguably, it would be harder to dismiss CCs as unrepresentative if they were able to act as delegates who make legitimate representations of priorities and proposals directly created by their communities.

This would increase CCs accountability by establishing ongoing mechanisms (i.e. participatory forums) for ensuring that representations made by CCs are in line with the priorities and views set by their communities. Their role would therefore be to facilitate public dialogue and deliberation, and then have delegated authority to take agreed recommendations and decisions to official meetings and consultations.

This would require a new mindset and model of leadership. Instead of following a traditional understanding of leadership –in which leaders set the direction of travel–, Community Councillors would follow a model of ‘facilitative leadership’ in which the role of the leader is to mediate and negotiate amongst competing interests and agendas in order to reach agreements and make things happen<sup>17</sup>.

#### **5. Rolling out a comprehensive training program covering not only topical areas but also process skills.**

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<sup>16</sup> For research on Participatory Budgeting, as well as participatory and deliberative democracy, see for instance Baiocchi (2005), Sintomer *et al.* (2008), Smith (2009), Ganuza *et al.* (2013), and Davidson and Elstub (2013).

<sup>17</sup> On ‘facilitative leadership’ see Bussu and Bartels (2013).

Previous research<sup>18</sup> has shown that CCs training is patchy across Scotland, and it only covers certain aspects within their remit (i.e. planning). If CCs are to become catalysers of citizen participation in local democracy, Community Councillors will need support to develop knowledge and skills not only about the issues they deal with, but also about the processes that they can put in place to foster public engagement with those issues. This means that it is not only important that they understand issues such as planning, legislation or strategic policies, but it is also crucial that they develop know-how on communication, facilitation, mediation and negotiation. These are the micro-foundations of meaningful dialogue and deliberation that are so often lacking in democratic practices. Therefore, there is considerable scope to make CCs capable of better public engagement –rather than just consultation– by developing their know-how regarding communication dynamics, meeting formats, mediation techniques, and facilitation approaches.

## **6. Create a national CCs Best Practice Network**

There are examples of good practice in CCs across the country, but unfortunately there is no national platform for sharing it with other CCs who are struggling to fulfil their aspirations. Accordingly, I would propose setting up a national Best Practice Network that would be tasked with documenting and sharing exemplars and analysing their key success factors. It could also provide communication channels for the more entrepreneurial CCs who may like to explore new forms of community empowerment (i.e. local development trusts). This Network could of course be part of a new National Association of Community Councils, along the lines proposed by some forum participants.

## **7. Allocate adequate support and resources to turn CCs into effective institutions of participatory democracy**

All the proposals above require substantial support, resources and funding both at national and local government levels. In return, public authorities would have an innovative mechanism for citizen participation upon which to build a robust structure for community engagement and participatory policy-making. That kind of new Community Council could play a more substantial role in Community Planning. This could help Community Planning Partnerships to establish a clear link between their strategic work and community engagement on the ground. That link is often absent at the moment.

## **A way forward**

In terms of how to set in motion some of these changes, the Scottish Government could organise a national Citizens' Assembly to create the framework for a substantial reform of CCs. This could be based on

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<sup>18</sup> See Scottish Government (2013).

international experiences with deliberative assemblies, so that the reform is driven bottom-up –that is, by citizens and Community Councillors. The Assembly could last three days: the first to hear evidence and learn about good and bad practice in CCs; the second to generate proposals for reform based on the evidence; the third for decision making on the framework for the reform. To ensure diversity and legitimacy, the Assembly could include 1 CCs delegate per LAA, plus one randomly selected (e.g. from the electoral roll) citizen per LAA ensuring diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, etc. To make the Assembly meaningful, the Scottish Government would have to give assurances that the recommendations of the Assembly would clearly guide the reforms.

In my opinion, it is paramount that CCs are reformed in order to break the vicious circle that seems to keep many of them in an unfair limbo – as argued earlier. In my view, it's everyone's responsibility (Local Authorities, Scottish Government, citizens, etc) to make them work. If CCs are properly reformed they could play a crucial role in strengthening local democracy. Their contributions to this forum indicate that many are ready and willing to explore new ways of fulfilling their democratic aspirations.

Edinburgh, 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2014

## Annex 1– Forum programme

### **Strengthening local democracy in Scotland:**

#### **The Community Councils' perspective**

13.00-16.00pm, 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2014

COSLA, Verity House, Edinburgh

A participative forum with Community Councillors facilitated by the Academy of Government (University of Edinburgh) to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy.

12.15	Registration and lunch
13.00	Introduction to the forum
13.15	What is the Community Councils' vision for local democracy?
13.55	Break
14.10	What are the current problems and challenges?
14.50	Break
15.05	What are the potential solutions and reforms?
15.50	Wrap up: What happens next?
16.00	Close and farewell

## Annex 2– Contributions by Community Councillors by themes

The following tables collate all the points (written in coloured-coded cards) contributed by participants during the three sessions of the forum. I have grouped them by themes, although many issues clearly overlap. When I did not manage to include a point in the overarching themes, or couldn't understand its context, I added it at the end of each table. The tables include both the cards that each group prioritised for plenary discussion (Priority Cards), and the rest of cards generated by participants during small group discussion (Other Cards). When contentious points elicited a split between minority and majority views I have noted this in brackets.

<b>Session 1</b>	
<b>What is the Community Councils' vision for local democracy?</b>	
[Green cards]	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Cards written by forum participants</b>
<b>Making local democracy more participatory by involving citizens in policy and decision making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local democracy should be resident led</li> <li>• Bottom up not top down</li> <li>• Local democracy means “needs of the people” led also; e.g. steering advisory groups needed from residents</li> <li>• Local democracy should mean resident’s views are listened to and valued</li> <li>• Proper consultation with residents</li> <li>• Meaningful consultation; resident led</li> <li>• Every person in each community feels able to contribute ideas and issues and know how to accomplish this</li> <li>• The local community has the resource, knowledge and opportunity to access and influence macro and local decisions</li> <li>• More involvement with local decision making</li> <li>• C/C should have more power</li> <li>• Devolved authority</li> <li>• Promote community spirit</li> </ul>
<b>Developing effective collaboration between Local Authorities and Community Councils</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration over implementing decisions– Local Authority + CC</li> <li>• LA should consult CC before decisions taken</li> <li>• Meaningful consultation</li> <li>• Sharing responsibility</li> <li>• Views listened to and being respected</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensible level of support from the Local Authority</li> <li>• More and better dialogue with council officials</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L/A should consult more with C/C</li> <li>• CC should work in close partnership with LA</li> <li>• Collaboration in use of common funds + implementation of decisions</li> <li>• Close collaboration for CCs regarding the ‘stewardship’ of common good funds and assets</li> <li>• Two-way conversation not tick-box culture; feedback needed</li> <li>• No LA employees on CCs; no LA interference in CCs; [minority view, this was the experience of one CC only]</li> <li>• No public servants acting as community councillors</li> </ul>
<b>Developing vibrant, diverse and inclusive Community Councils</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningful representation- not tokenism!</li> <li>• Demographical equal representation</li> <li>• Inclusivity</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusive</li> <li>• Resident led</li> <li>• A full hall at CC meetings</li> <li>• Broad mix of representation from the community</li> <li>• Inclusiveness</li> <li>• Community council representation and electoral process are truly inclusive and influenced totally by the community</li> <li>• Demographically equal representation: age, sex, social group</li> <li>• Vision needed includes a demographical equal representation</li> </ul>
<b>Improving how Community Councils work</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved communication: with statutory bodies, with the community</li> <li>• Clearly defined objectives</li> <li>• Formal structure which supports: accountability, KPIs [Key Performance Indicators], training, not tick boxes debate</li> <li>• All community councils to be subject to elections – if insufficient number come forward to trigger an election, CC to be disbanded! [this was a minority view opposed by most participants during plenary]</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexible to change</li> <li>• Integrated with other voluntary groups</li> <li>• Training for community councillors + support</li> <li>• A method for developing volunteers and training them</li> <li>• Genuine elections</li> </ul>
<b>Raising the profile of</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising profile of CC</li> <li>• Improving the visibility of our work</li> </ul>

<b>Community Councils</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening our voice</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for our contribution</li> <li>• Visible + sharing responsibility</li> <li>• Some recognition from L.A. that CC's have positive ideas to share for the benefit of all</li> </ul>
<b>Community Councils funding</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding [not everyone agreed with this point being a priority, some argued that it's more about resources and support than about money, others gave examples of how their CC worked to secure funds for projects]</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should there be additional funding to CC to facilitate and enable them to perform more effectively?</li> <li>• Funding for report or individual review [e.g. in court]</li> <li>• Local budget from central government</li> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence (not restricted)</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Personal responsibility</li> <li>• Cuts in budgets should be local</li> <li>• CCP are too large and should be split on</li> <li>• Open</li> <li>• Reduced bureaucracy</li> <li>• Presenting L.A. supporting project that have not had community approval</li> </ul>

<p><b>Session 2</b></p> <p><b>What are the current problems and challenges?</b></p> <p>[Blue cards]</p>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Cards written by forum participants</b>
<b>Problems and challenges regarding citizen participation in local policy and decision</b>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officials make decisions with no reference to local opinion. This is not democratic.</li> <li>• Lack of engagement; not consultation but engagement/dialogue through the process</li> <li>• LA sees consultation as a box ticking exercise only. They will not respond to residents views</li> <li>• Informed decision making: transparency in consultation (explain decision)</li> </ul>

<p><b>making</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning approvals not democratic enough &amp; appeals</li> <li>• Lack of meaningful consultation: engaging whole community, transparent decision making</li> <li>• To ensure that local authorities actually do empower + support the community as they implement devolved decisions</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary sector voice not heard</li> <li>• Officers culture lack knowledge of engagement</li> <li>• What engagement in Health and Social Care Partnerships</li> <li>• Are tribunals a means of settling a grievance as opposed to going along ombudsman route –i.e. holding to account if consultation fails</li> <li>• Holding LAs to account</li> <li>• Decisions made without local input</li> <li>• How to involve communities in decision making?</li> <li>• Challenge: get council to listen to local problems and act in the interest of the local community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Problems and challenges regarding how local government works</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture change needed in L.Gov.</li> <li>• Ensuring that all services provided are shared as fairly as possible</li> <li>• Reducing LA budgets. What to cut?</li> <li>• L.A. should be held to account if needs be for their actions</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a centralising Scottish Government</li> <li>• Scottish Gov control not L.A control</li> <li>• Is Community Planning democratic?</li> <li>• Top down when it should be bottom up</li> <li>• De-centralisation</li> <li>• Poor/insensitive decisions made by local authority</li> <li>• Local authority is unaccountable</li> <li>• Accountability: nobody carries the can in many local councils when things go wrong</li> <li>• A more hands-off approach by LA's etc</li> <li>• Transfer of care to new structure independent of L.A + NHS</li> <li>• Isolation of rural communities geographically, socially, services, etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Problems and challenges regarding how Community Councils work</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] when evaluating whether group 'fit for purpose'</li> <li>• Lack of training: up-skilling of community councils; community empowerment requires skills</li> <li>• No clear mission statement in some CCs (although some participants argued that this is implicit in CC legislation)</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular-ongoing training +support for community councillors</li> <li>• Getting funding to deal with local issues</li> <li>• Strategic understanding</li> <li>• Continuity</li> <li>• Enforce rules</li> <li>• No record kept of how individual councillors vote on issues!</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Team work</li> <li>• Paperwork: form filling</li> <li>• More interaction with local housing organisation, councillors, schools, etc</li> <li>• There should be a S/G handbook for all C/C and not a L/A handbook</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges of improving diversity and inclusion in Community Councils</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding the right people (that is, those who want to get engaged, have time, experience)</li> <li>• More youth involvement</li> <li>• Encourage youth involvement</li> <li>• Increased non-commitment of community- non-involvement, withdrawal, fragmentation, lack of interest; better engagement with the community to attract recruits</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding + keeping people with the right ability</li> <li>• Involving youth</li> <li>• Encouraging young people to become involved</li> <li>• Lower the demographic of CCs</li> <li>• Participation: Apathy. Reliance on willingly volunteers.</li> <li>• Disinterest in local affairs</li> <li>• Loss of sense of community</li> <li>• CCs often have bad reputation</li> <li>• Good people are too busy already</li> </ul>
<p><b>Challenges related to the current standing of Community Councils and their relationship to Local Authorities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being listened to</li> <li>• Being valued</li> <li>• Value of CC questioned</li> <li>• Being taken seriously</li> <li>• C.C views ignored; would prefer to work as team</li> <li>• Team work lacking between Cc's + L.A- creates success</li> <li>• Lack of devolved authority from L.A. [to CCs]</li> <li>• Not enough support</li> <li>• More efficient routes into regional councils via CLLRs or direct?</li> <li>• Inconsistent interface to L.A. groups</li> <li>• No appetite in local authorities to empower CCs</li> <li>• L.A's do not value C.C perspective, i.e. leadership lacking in decisions</li> <li>• Persuading local councils to listen to their electorate</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we fit into local authority structure</li> <li>• No explanation of difference between councillor and C.C</li> <li>• Uncertainty about future: consultation, existence, responsibilities, funding, statutory, factors</li> <li>• Satisfying disparate needs of small vs. huge local populations. A challenge! Each resident has a 'democratic right'.</li> <li>• Delegated powers in planning not working</li> <li>• Challenge: allow community councils right of appeal against council decisions on planning issues</li> <li>• Planning decisions process and right of appeal</li> <li>• Lack of funding if requiring legal representation</li> <li>• If CCs disappear, then do we deny residents of a democratic right?</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal issues/conflict of interest</li> <li>• Formal management structure</li> <li>• Local engagement</li> <li>• Time</li> </ul>

<b>Session 3</b> <b>What are the potential solutions and reforms?</b> [Yellow cards]	
Themes	Cards written by forum participants
<b>Community Councils and Local Authorities working together to achieve better outcomes</b>	<b>Priority Cards:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L.A + C.C's must work in tandem + as a team to achieve successful outcome - good strong leadership</li> <li>• Resource CC's to carry out role and provide training</li> <li>• Better resources to promote engagement and support CC's; no party politics at local council level</li> <li>• LA runs strategic training and opportunities to understand legislation and financial constraints</li> <li>• LA + Public services recognise and use the amazing human resource and experience that exists in community councils- problem solving</li> <li>• Carrick community/council forum: got £200,000 to run a tourism project to bring wealth to our area. <a href="http://www.carrickayrshire.com">www.carrickayrshire.com</a> working with L/A, Leader and the communities</li> <li>• LA give CCs an achievable set of goals; supports partnership works [minority view of 1, and some CCs think it should be the other way around]</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish CCs as a functional partner in LA operations</li> <li>• Regular CC/Council engagements to discuss key issues</li> <li>• Community council federations to have a greater input with councils</li> <li>• Better, more appropriate training for senior council officials</li> <li>• Councillors and officials to be required by law if necessary, to enter into discussions with community councils over issues in their areas</li> <li>• Make L/A consult with L/C before budget cuts</li> <li>• Make CPP more local</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improving how Community Councils work</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an effective national Scottish + local C.C organisation/association offering training, advice, research, information + to facilitate networking</li> <li>• Training- all levels</li> <li>• Interaction and networking at every level to invite reps to meetings, be present at every event + local location</li> <li>• Regular interaction with local schools, housing agencies, senior council officers, police, etc. through attendance and meetings</li> <li>• Increased and effective use of social media- Facebook, twitter; to increase community engagement</li> <li>• Actively encourage nominations for CC seats to improve credibility</li> <li>• Rather than disband a CC's- work/support-find a solution</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconstitute the Scottish association of community councils</li> <li>• Resurrect the Scottish Association of CCs</li> <li>• To increase accountability, fairer decisions so that we have greater turnout</li> <li>• Better engagement within communities to attract more prospective community councillors</li> <li>• Engage youth- visit schools/clubs, etc + demographic representation</li> <li>• Would education of councillors help both local communities and officers. Participation would be better informed.</li> <li>• More group engagement sessions to ask: 'what the community needs' + act upon that</li> <li>• Better quality CCs will lead to better partnership working with LA</li> <li>• Record and publish every councillor's voting and attendance record</li> <li>• Make workload more manageable</li> <li>• Set realistic goals; who sets...</li> <li>• Be realistic in what we can achieve</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking facility for CCs and communities</li> <li>• Training in skills and procedures required in Community Councils</li> <li>• Verification of CC information gathering (agreed +funded process)</li> <li>• Fetes + galas</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ensuring public awareness, and improving esteem, of Community Councils</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change the image of CCs</li> <li>• Explaining role of CC to local residents + general publicity</li> <li>• Respect and appreciation of the potential of community councils</li> <li>• Raise profile of CC</li> <li>• Go to where people gather- gala days, football matches, libraries, any community event, church</li> <li>• Liaison with academies, schools, colleges- to form formally recognised young people’s community council to widen the age range + commitment</li> <li>• Local newsletter funded by LA</li> <li>• Huddersfield model of valuing in financial teams. £10 million of free time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential for initiatives and reforms at national level</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolved budgets to CC, just if they want it</li> <li>• Restructure CCs to reflect differences between rural, urban + city areas to better represent their respective memberships with delegation of appropriate powers</li> <li>• Reform at nation level to empower CC’s- national legislation</li> <li>• Formalising CCs within local authority structure</li> <li>• Separate rural area from urban area- needs so different?</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More funding- all CC’s should be treated the same by their LA</li> <li>• Make sure the resources match the ambition and the role</li> <li>• Give C/C realistic budget to employ someone to work for them</li> <li>• All C/C should have a strong budget from S/G</li> <li>• Empower CCs, replicate “parish” councils</li> <li>• Community right to buy? Empowering: generate income</li> <li>• Community right to buy-empowering!</li> <li>• All CC in Scotland should operate on the same remit, not opinions as we have here!</li> <li>• Consistent approach to representation on common good funds</li> <li>• Root &amp; branch review of planning law</li> <li>• Financial constraint on councils by government</li> <li>• Introduce a judicial process to adjudicate where the LA cannot be held to account. It would require finance</li> <li>• Ask the Scottish government to stop watering down the</li> </ul>

	<p>community engagement ... [unreadable word]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate rural from urban areas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Improving local democracy by prioritising engagement over consultation, and by making consultation more meaningful</b></p>	<p><b>Priority Cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement (i.e. dialogue and deliberation) vs. consultation</li> <li>• Adequate representation bottom up</li> <li>• Council's must either accept majority view on any consultation response or provide detailed and reasoned explanation, individually at public meetings</li> </ul> <p><b>Other cards:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningful consultation and involvement</li> <li>• Ideas, focussed solutions to bring people together</li> <li>• Community engagement in "common good" issues</li> <li>• Similar course as today for councillors + officials</li> <li>• Media need to be better reporting local issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other points</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political party membership should be suspended for appointment to L.A.</li> <li>• Stop paying Councillors a salary</li> <li>• No more delegated powers</li> <li>• Elected CLLR's to hold open meetings as opposed to surgeries</li> <li>• Define how leaders of regional councils are elected- by whom!</li> <li>• Wind farms legislation</li> <li>• Cut backs</li> </ul>

## Annex 3– Facilitator brief

- Your job is to ensure that everyone has opportunities to participate, that everyone’s ideas are respected, and that the task is carried out effectively.
- There is little time and a lot of work, so time-keeping is essential. You may contribute to the conversation, but please lead by example and avoid taking too much ‘air time’.

### Structure for Table Deliberation:

1. **Quiet time [3 minutes]**. Read the question on the screen and allow participants 2 minutes of quiet time to write their points on the cards. Important:
  - a. Use the bingo pens and the allocated cards (session 1 = green; session 2 = blue; session 3 = yellow)
  - b. One point per card. If a participant has several points please ask them to write each point on a different card
2. **Sharing [8 minutes]**. One by one invite each participant to briefly share their points and place the cards on the table so that everyone can see them. Important:
  - a. This round is just to listen to all the points; discussion will take place at the next round and the plenary.
3. **Prioritising [9 minutes]**. Participants discuss the points made and prioritise 3 points/cards to be taken to the plenary discussion. Important:
  - a. Explain that all the cards will be collected for the report, but now we are deciding what priorities should be discussed in the plenary.
  - b. Allow discussion and clarification of the cards. Participants may want to merge similar cards into a new one.
  - c. Then seek consensus on the 3 cards that you will take to the plenary. If the group can’t reach consensus, ask participants to vote by marking with a dot their preferred 3 cards. Then tally the votes and check that the group agrees.

### SESSIONS / TIMINGS / QUESTIONS

Table discussion 1 1.15 – 1.35pm	Table discussion 2 2.10 – 2.30pm	Table discussion 3 3.05 – 3.25pm
<b>What is the Community Councils’ <u>vision</u> for local democracy?</b> (Green cards)	<b>What are the current <u>problems and challenges</u>?</b> (Blue cards)	<b>What are the <u>potential solutions and reforms</u>?</b> (Yellow cards)

## Annex 4– Delegates list

Council	Community Councillor	Community Council
Aberdeen City	John Gerrie	Kingswell
Aberdeenshire	Helen Young	Buchan
	Ray Murray	Fordyce, Sandend and District
Angus	Dougie Pond	Friockheim
Argyll & Bute	Peta Burton-Smith	Avick & Kilchrenan
Clackmannanshire	Jon Jordon	Muckart
Dumfries and Galloway	Maureen Johnstone	Lower Nithsdale Federation of Community Councils
	Adam Anderson	Moffit & District
East Ayrshire	Tom Milloy	Darvel
East Dunbartonshire	Gordon Carmichael	Community Council Liaison Committee
East Lothian	Judith Priest	Dunpender
East Renfrewshire	David Jesner	Newton Mearns
	Eleanor Kellock	Clarkston
	Savio D'Souza	Giffnock
Edinburgh, City of	Steve Gregory	Morningside
Falkirk	Jim Kelly	
Fife	David Henderson	Kirkcaldy West
Glasgow	Angus Quinn	Pollockshields
	Gill Young	Woodside
Inverclyde	David Goddard	Kilmacolm

Moray	Les Morgan	Findhorn & Kinross
North Ayrshire	Bill Calderwood	Arran
North Lanarkshire	Maria Donovan	Greengairs
Perth & Kinross	Victor Clements	Aberfeldy
Renfrewshire	Neil Barrington	Langbank
Scottish Borders	Frank Connelly	Heriot
Shetland Islands	Kate Massie	Association of Shetland CCs
South Ayrshire	Peter Mason	Maybole
South Lanarkshire	Frank Gunning	Royal Burgh of Lanark
Stirling	Chris Kane	Braehead & District
West Dunbartonshire	Drummond McNair	Parkhall, North Kilbowie and Central
	Rhona Young	Old Kilpatrick
West Lothian	Ian Buchanan	Craigshill

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