Community Participation Action Learning Report

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Contents

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of the emerging themes from the community empowerment action learning process which took place between the months of February and May 2018.

The aim of the action learning process was to enable Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) across Scotland to share experiences in relation to the meaningful engagement and participation of communities in community planning processes, develop learning, take actions to improve practice and reflect collectively on opportunities and challenges in the current context.

In framing the action learning process, consideration was given to Part 2 of the Community Empowerment Act and the National Standards for Community Engagement (Figure 1) which define community engagement as:

"Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences".

Updated in 2015, the National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement and improve what happens as a result.

The findings are intended to provide learning for CPPs, Scottish Government and other key stakeholders on what helps to improve community planning processes, and what still needs to change in tackling operational, structural and cultural barriers. The paper can also be used by CPPs as a learning resource which showcases good practice, and highlights lessons learned.

Figure 1 – National Standards for Community Engagement

Inclusion
We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement.

Support
We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.

Communication
We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.

Impact
We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what has been learned to improve our future community engagement.

Planning
There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.

Methods
We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

Working Together
We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.

Background

The community empowerment action learning programme took place over four months. It revolved around two sessions of regional 'clusters' of CPPs with an opportunity for individual CPPs to put their learning into practice in the period between the sessions. The first session provided an opportunity to share stories of practice and identify actions to be taken at local level; and the second provided an opportunity to reflect on the actions taken, identify key areas of learning, and follow up on what had been achieved.

The programme was delivered in five regional clusters across the country and twenty-seven CPPs participated. The CPPs who did not participate for logistical reasons and/or financial constraints were able to contribute their views through specific meetings or online.

The sessions were organised and delivered by the Improvement Service (IS) and Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), with local venues provided by the participating CPPs. The programme was funded by the Scottish Government.

Key Themes

The report has been split into five 'headline themes'. The themes reflect the broad range of inputs from participating CPPs across the two sessions. They are:

1. Information and Knowledge
2. Building and Developing Relationships
3. Communication and Participation
4. Participation Methods
5. Changing and Sharing Power

Illustration of themes from the Shared Learning Event in September 2018

The following sections provide a summary of the key issues and learning points generated by CPPs at the events under each theme. This is followed by some observations and reflections by IS and SCDC as facilitators of the programme, and the last section contains recommendations from IS and SCDC on next steps that will build on the strengths of the programme and facilitate improved community participation by CPPs in Scotland.

Theme 1 – Information and Knowledge

This theme was widely discussed over the two sessions, covering all aspects of gathering and analysing data, and the sharing of information and knowledge across the community planning partnership and communities to inform decision making at a strategic and operational level.

- Many CPPs have focused on gathering data to inform the priorities within Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs) and Locality Plans. However, a key challenge is to get better at sharing data, knowledge and intelligence, across councils, community planning partners, the third and private sectors to more intelligently inform decision making.

- Limited resources prevent CPPs from developing the skills to properly gather, analyse and interrogate data as much as they would like to, and better collaboration and sharing across CPPs around good and innovative practice would be beneficial to ensure CPPs are "making the best use of the data we have".

- Whilst most CPPs undertake mapping exercises focused on available assets, opportunities for engagement and local resources to inform a more collaborative approach to planning and decision making, some are also mapping all current engagement across community planning partners with the aim of reducing duplication and developing a more coordinated approach to engagement across the CPP area.

- Quantitative data should be "double-checked" with communities to ensure that it reflects their lived experiences as there is potential danger in making judgements (around planning and resources at a strategic level) based solely on quantitative data that does not also consider the value of added qualitative information from people and communities.

- Data used by CPPs should be made available to communities to ensure transparency and would go some way to tackling any issues around trust and how data is used, (for example providing up to date information on building running costs where asset transfers are being discussed.)

- With regard to performance information, CPPs indicated that they are working in a complex system but are still trying to measure performance using linear indicators, therefore a mixed system where they not only measure progress but supplement this with qualitative (anecdotal) evidence, focus groups, feedback from meetings, etc. and building on learning which has been identified by the sharing of good practice is required.

The National Standards for Community Engagement highlight the importance of access to information and how it's used. This is incorporated most significantly in the Planning and

Communication Standards which state that: 'partners are involved at the start of the process in identifying and defining the focus that the engagement will explore'; 'information is made available in appropriate formats'; and 'without breaking confidentiality, participants have access to all information that is relevant to the engagement'.

We would consider this a fundamental threshold for sharing information about community engagement by CPPs, however in relation to community participation there are other points to consider, such as:

- What do communities say of their experience of participation and how are CPPs collating and analysing this information to improve practice?

- How do partners take equal responsibility for community participation including coordinating activity and sharing resources?

- How do communities tell their stories and are how are they heard rather than a reliance on the stories CPPs construct through (largely) SIMD data? How can this have equal status?

- How do communities influence what data should be gathered in the first place?

CPPs may benefit from placing a greater value on information and knowledge generated through community engagement and participation activities. Participation should not be restricted to 'double checking' priorities that have been identified through quantitative datasets and/or how these can be achieved but can also help CPPs with setting priorities based on what's important to the community.

Table 1 – Information and Knowledge: Example

West Lothian CPP: Joining up Regeneration and Community Planning

What was the Problem/Issue?

The Community Empowerment Act stipulated the need to develop locality plans. At this point West Lothian had already developed the concept for regeneration plans, and so the CPP agreed to use the eight regeneration plans as the basis for their locality plans. The focus of the work revolved around ensuring that the process was joined up and a wide range of partners, including community organisations, were actively engaged.

What did we as a CPP do?

There are now 13 individual regeneration areas (two of the eight regeneration areas were quite big and widespread and the communities wanted them split into smaller localities), all with steering groups that are supported by a regeneration officer (there are five regeneration officers covering the 13 areas). Key themes and issues have been identified by each local regeneration group. Local actions have emerged which are relevant to local communities but also relate to wider priorities. Plans are at draft stage and we now want more community involvement at strategic level. The process is not complete yet, but we feel like we have made a good start in involving communities.

What helped us to improve community participation?

Robust community engagement. Evidence from community engagement was sometimes different from what the statistics were saying so the challenge was to marry them up (a balancing act). We have thought about who we are trying to engage, and how. Previously we had tended to talk to the same people all the time, but have worked hard to change this e.g. in Whitburn we undertook a community engagement exercise with the food bank; the anti-poverty strategy was presented, and by making it public it naturally brought new people to the table.

What were the barriers to improving community participation?

Membership includes the full range of CP partners. However, there isn't consistent membership in each area, for example in some areas GP surgeries have engaged whereas in others not so much. Participation also varies between groups depending on which organisations are present in each area. The process around community participation is lengthy and involves evidence gathering; asset mapping with the community to try and identify gaps; highlighting opportunities; raising awareness of the assets available in the areas; and promoting use of them. This doesn't always fit with strategic planning timescales.

What are we learning?

There are key aspects of the community engagement work that we're learning from. Sometimes when you think you've done really well / reached out to the right people you find out that perhaps you could still do better – need to go to places where people are – shop, bus station, job centre, local pub – get people who are not engaged with this at all and develop methods to find out their needs and aspirations. Don't ignore groups you already have engaged with - reach out to them and be proactive.

When thinking of the purpose of engagement, consider how you phrase things – what benefit does it bring to people giving up their time? It needs to be a two-way approach. Always keep in mind the purpose - is it to get peoples' opinions to validate plans we have or is the purpose of the engagement to empower communities?

Theme 2 – Building and Developing Relationships

The importance of building and developing relationships was a key theme raised across all the sessions. CPPs identified that many of the successes for partnerships are down to the working relationships that exist, both at a Board / thematic level, but importantly when working with people and communities.

- Relationships between the CPP (with an emphasis on the councils) and communities can often be viewed as a parent / child type relationship which can have a negative effect on the way that Community Planning Partnerships approach participation with communities, and the way communities participate.

- CPPs should treat people as active citizens rather than customers (recipients of services) and empower officers to be able to act accordingly in developing these valuable relationships.

- Building the capacity of communities to fully participate rather than engage, is exemplified by CPPs who are looking at models of governance, particularly at a local level, that seek to involve community representatives in decision-making structures. This promotes the role of CPPs as facilitators and enablers of participation, and community members as active partners which was identified by one CPP as the biggest enabler in a partnership.

- Whilst the introduction of LOIPs and Locality Planning emphasises the need to reduce inequality, and therefore CPPs will target more disadvantaged communities, many CPPs highlighted that this should not be at the expense of at least maintaining effective relationships, through participation, with all communities within the CPP area.

- Many CPPs highlighted that it is important to have continuing conversations and dialogue which prevents people from making assumptions that nothing is happening and that people are not being listened to, and helps to build these positive working relationships across partnerships.

- CPPs identified that the opportunities (and challenges) that come with social media can help to sustain participation in a time of constrained resources and not being able to always provide face-to-face contact. It was noted that future community engagement will increasingly be undertaken through digital means and that this may facilitate differing levels of participation with communities and individuals.

- There is more work to do to fully comply with the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (the CE Act), that places the duty to facilitate Community

Planning on five organisations,[1] rather than just the council, as it was previously. There is still a tendency (in some cases) for councils to be viewed as the 'lead agency'.

• Also, in respect of the CE Act, and as a way of developing relationships with the community, there is a role for CPPs in making people aware of the rights they now have under the Act and how CPPs can be a partner in the process rather than just recipients of asset transfers and participation requests.

To support this the Working Together Standard from the National Standards for Community Engagement emphasises the need for communication between all participants to be 'open, honest and clear', the community engagement process to be 'based on trust and mutual respect'; and that 'participants are supported to develop their skills and confidence during the engagement'.

Table 2 – Building and Developing Relationships Example

East Ayrshire CPP: Transformational Community Representation

What was the Problem/Issue?

Community Councils were represented by two organisations whose remit was undergoing a period of change and the CPP wanted to ensure that it was still appropriate for them to be the sole community representatives. The CPP sent a survey to all Community Councils in early 2016 asking them if they felt they were adequately represented and how they felt representation could be strengthened.

On the strength of these results a consultation event was held for community organisations as well as Community Councils to inform them about the existing Community Planning Partnership, how it works and to hear their ideas about how the community could be represented at a strategic level within the partnership, and how communities can be more effectively involved in community planning.

This conversation took place at a time when the whole relationship between the Council, its community planning partners and local communities was being transformed through the work of Vibrant Communities, within the broader context of the community empowerment legislation. The focus was increasingly on an asset-based approach; working with rather than for our communities ; listening to them; valuing their knowledge, skills and experience; and most importantly, empowering them to shape the future development of their own, sustainable communities through the development of community led action plans. It was

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1   Council, NHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, Scottish Enterprise (or Highlands and Islands Enterprise, where applicable).

therefore essential to ensure that there was strong and effective community representation in the partnership's strategic decision-making structures.

Within this wider context, and informed by the results of the Community Councils' survey and feedback from the consultation event, it was felt that it would be more effective for communities if membership was widened out to include representation, not only from Community Councils, but also from Community Led Action Plan groups.

What did we as a CPP do?

Through Vibrant Communities, all Community Councils were contacted with an outline of the purpose of the Community Planning Partnership and the contribution required from Community Representatives. Two representatives were identified one from the North of the Authority and one from the South.

The Community Action Plan Forum was provided with similar information and identified two representatives. Again, one from the north and one from the south of the authority.

What helped us to improve community participation?

All representatives were given an induction to ensure that they understood who was involved in the Partnership, what areas the CPP had responsibility for and what the expectations of the Community Representatives were.

The representatives worked with Vibrant Communities to develop a framework for communicating with Community Councils and the Forum. They were also allocated a worker who could support them between meetings to ensure that they understood what they had to do, assist them to share information with communities and offer support if necessary.

A member of CPP met with all representatives before meetings to go through the agenda and any supplementary papers. This ensures that everyone is aware of the areas to be discussed and has a stronger understanding of the information and the effect it may have on communities. They also have the opportunity to ask questions about anything they are unclear about in a more relaxed setting.

What were the barriers to improving community participation?

Timing of meetings:

- daytime does not suit those who work daytimes
- information is received very close to the meeting so the representatives may not always have enough time to consult the wider group in advance.

It has been a steep learning curve for the representatives as they are involved in areas they may not have previous experience in. They can sometimes be overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork attached to one meeting.

What are we learning?

The importance of ensuring that our committee reports and community updates contain less jargon and are more accessible – this is an ongoing area for improvement, but the focus is increasingly on reporting to and communicating with our communities, and our reporting materials/methods are being reviewed and adapted accordingly.

That truly empowered community representatives bring a fresh viewpoint to the strategic decision-making forum and can provide a valuable and constructive challenge from a genuine community-based perspective.

That effective community engagement supports and improves two-way communication, both empowering communities to feed into the strategic decision-making process and also, importantly, providing a conduit for the strategic direction to be shared with communities – closing the circle and ensuring a common 'golden thread' between all of our work to achieve improved outcomes across East Ayrshire.

Theme 3 – Communication and Participation

Clear communication, language and open and honest dialogue with communities was viewed as important in bringing people and communities 'on board' and encouraging them to participate. Part of this is recognising that each locality (within a CPP) is different and therefore partnerships have to adapt accordingly – there is no 'one size fits all approach'.

- CPPs should articulate to communities the benefits that come from the participation process – it must demonstrate value otherwise communities may become disenfranchised.

- Many CPPs also highlighted the issue that has been considered for some time around engagement and participation, i.e. how do we reach out to all communities. Several CPPs offered examples around where they are making progress in reaching out to all communities, particularly those who experience disadvantage and who may not have the skills and resources to be able to participate. One of the participating CPPs identified their work with schools as a means of not only engaging with children and young people but also as a way of engaging with parents.

- CPPs identified that it is important to check the perceptions of the people and communities we engage with to find out whether they feel their input was valued as part of the process.

- Participation will be new to a lot of people in communities therefore there should be discussions with communities around how best to build on initial engagement to facilitate their ongoing participation.

- Many CPPs identified 'honesty' as central to effective communication and participation. Clarity on the scope of what can and cannot be delivered within resources is critical to managing expectations and helps prevent community members from becoming frustrated and cynical which are deterrents to future participation.

- From an internal perspective, many CPPs identified that they would benefit from a multi-agency communications strategy to ensure a joint approach that promotes the aims, outputs and general branding of the partnerships. This approach would allow the CPP to clearly communicate current and future engagement events and reduce the potential for overlap and duplication.

- Partners organisations have different definitions and viewpoints around engagement and participation so use of a 'common language' will ensure a shared understanding both within the CPP but externally with people and communities.

The 'Working Together' and 'Communication' standard of the National Standards for Community

Engagement identify a range of key 'how will we know?' statements that exemplify many of the opportunities / challenges identified above. In particular they emphasise the need for: 'information on the community engagement process, and what has happened as a result, (being) clear and easy to access and understand'; systems being in place to 'make sure the views of the wider community continuously help to shape the engagement process'; and that 'feedback is a true representation of the range of views expressed during the engagement process'.

Table 3 – Communications and Engagement Example

Stirling CPP: Improving Participation (including Learning from Participatory Budgeting)

What was the Problem/Issue?

The CPP recognised that the previous 'one-size fits all' approach is no longer a suitable approach for enhancing and improving community participation given the differences across the area (from urban to rural).

What did we as a CPP do?

In developing the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan, the CPP agreed to split the area into 4 localities (Urban North, Urban South, Rural North and Rural South). By adopting this approach, the CPP were keen to learn more and increase their understanding around participation in each of the areas.

What helped us to improve community participation?

The CPP had held two participatory budgeting (PB) events (one urban and one rural) which were used not only to commence a programme around PB but also to develop a better understanding of what is required for effective community empowerment and participation in the process. The CPP has also supported community led plans, with partners providing support to ensure that they are delivered. Furthermore, there is a recognition that the Council has a good record on asset transfer.

What were the barriers to improving community participation?

The CPP recognises that affluent areas are better at engaging in the process and therefore it needs to focus on building skills and capacity in those communities who are so far not engaged. In addition, the CPP cannot assume that what works in one area will automatically work in another. The CPP has to date undertaken a number of engagement exercises and evaluations (e.g. around the effect of PB on community engagement teamwork), however the impact or the effectiveness is not always apparent. Its therefore difficult to make a judgement on what works.

What are we learning?

The CPP is learning that even though they undertake community capacity building, there is a need to approach this in a more joined-up manner across all CPP partners. It is hoped that this would bring an enhanced level of resource and experience from across a range of agencies that could be utilised in enabling community to better participate in the decision-making process. It is also not just about the 'traditional' CPP partner agencies or Council services but that there is an increasing role for schools and Headteachers who have been pivotal to what has been achieved to date. With that in mind the CPP wants to develop new partnerships, e.g. local businesses, equalities groups, young people, older people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants and existing community participation bodies. The CPP also acknowledges that not everyone wants to engage or participate. Therefore, it needs to understand what people understand by empowerment.

Theme 4 – Participation Methods

There was broad agreement across the sessions that there is not one single method or process of developing community participation. In fact, the opposite is true. To secure effective participation as partners, we need to ensure that we adapt to the needs and expectations of each particular locality or community of interest.

- CPPs indicated that despite the opportunities brought about by the CE Act, not every person or community wants to engage or be part of an ongoing participation exercise. Some people want none at all, some just want to be informed, some want to engage now and then and some want to be active participants.

- Accessibility is key - CPPs need to ensure that everyone has equal access to participation opportunities and provide a variety of ways that enable them to participate. This will also provide people a choice in how, and at what level they choose to engage and participate.

- Recognising diversity and 'hearing the hidden voices' means CPPs need to think differently about reaching those most marginalised, providing different routes to participation and learning from practice elsewhere. This also means speaking to people about what they want, need or aspire to and not assuming that we think we know the answer. Participants said that we must 'hear' what people are saying, and not just 'listen'.

- There were a range of good examples of engaging with people in different ways to secure their participation, for example, through local schools (which can be a powerful community hub), GP surgeries, supermarkets and day centres. CPPs were keen to point out that we need to go to the communities where they interact and not expect that they will come to us. Engagement methods that cost the most, may not be the most successful, e.g. hiring a space and paying for catering will incur more costs than speaking to people at the local shops or supermarket.

- CPPs should enable officers to test out different approaches to engagement. They need to be willing to take risks, have an open conversation about potential risks, learn from mistakes and as a result not feel that they are under pressure if a particular engagement method fails to achieve its intended results.

- CPP engagement is not just about how the CPP engages with people and communities. CPPs should also recognise the part that local community members and volunteers play in terms of being able to provide additional capacity, expertise, and local leadership to address issues and priorities.

Inclusion and the use of inclusive methods are key principles within the National Standards for Community Engagement. The Inclusion Standard states that: 'we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement' while the Methods Standard emphasises: the need to 'use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose'; that 'methods used are acceptable and accessible to participants'; and that 'the methods used are evaluated and adapted, if necessary, in response to feedback from participants and partners'.

Table 4 – Engagement Methods Example

Inverclyde CPP: Our Place, Our Future – A Community Engagement Approach to Strategic Planning

What was the Problem/Issue?

Inverclyde CPP were keen to work with communities across Inverclyde to develop their Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) to ensure that the plan prioritised the outcomes and activities that would make the most difference to people's lives and in recognition of the fact that communities themselves hold the answers to the problems experienced by those living in their area.

What did we as a CPP do?

In 2016, Inverclyde CPP undertook an extensive 6-month community engagement with stakeholders across Inverclyde via a survey and a series of community events.

Using the Place Standard tool, Inverclyde CPP's 'Our Place Our Future' survey aimed to capture people's views on a wide range of themes affecting the local community including housing, safety, public transport, facilities and local amenities and play and recreation. An adapted survey was also developed to consult with children and young people, with questions tailored to suit a young audience.

This was the largest consultation ever undertaken by Inverclyde CPP, with almost 2% of residents aged 16 and over completing the survey. This was the highest rate of engagement Inverclyde CPP had ever achieved, with the findings from the consultation directly informing the key priorities that were included in the LOIP.

What helped us to improve community participation?

The CPP used a wide range of mechanisms to reach as many people as possible, including: social media and online advertising; a series of community 'drop-in' days across Inverclyde; stalls in public places with high footfall and engaging with existing community networks and groups.

This work was helped by the CPP receiving a small amount of funding from the Big Lottery Fund, which provided additional resources to coordinate the consultation and produce marketing materials.

What were the barriers to improving community participation?

The CPP initially struggled to engage with certain groups of people and quickly found that different methods of engagement were effective in engaging with different groups. Importantly, the CPP found that inviting members of the community to come to engagement events at venues that the CPP had hired was less effective, and more expensive, than going to places where members of the community regularly visit. For example, the CPP learned that undertaking consultation in shopping centres and supermarkets proved highly effective in reaching groups that would not normally engage with these processes.

What are we learning?

Importantly, Inverclyde CPP were keen that the consultation would not be a one-off exercise and plan to repeat the process in 3 years, to understand the progress that has been made in addressing the issues that members of the community highlighted as being most important to them.

Capitalising on the high levels of community engagement that the 'Our Place, Our Future' consultation achieved, Inverclyde CPP also aims to continue to work closely with the community in delivering the LOIP.

Theme 5 – Changing Culture and Sharing Power

The final key theme is around changing culture and sharing power. Overall, this was the most discussed area across the two sessions. It focused on the following:

- Strategic leadership throughout the CPP - the role this plays in empowering staff to enable them to develop relationships and make decisions with the community and developing trust between agencies and people.

- Planning - focusing on the number of plans and policies that exist, and the impact on the need to engage with people and communities.

- The impact of Participatory Budgeting - what it will mean, what we can learn, and how effective is it in encouraging participation and producing real, tangible impacts for communities?

- The need to develop the skills and knowledge of Elected Members – i.e. around the different methods for engaging with and securing participation from communities.

- The expectations around how long it can take to develop relationships between community planning partners and communities and the subsequent outcomes for that effort.

- The need to look at new ways of working - what can CPPs do (or need to do) differently that will ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate in the CP process should they wish to do so.

In relation to the above, there was a view that there needs to be a political and strategic cultural shift (around sharing of power) that trusts and empowers people and communities to do more for themselves. This would emphasise the role of CPPs in enabling and facilitating, not only communities, but also officers in being able to make decisions that would allow this culture change to develop.

As one CPP stated, the process needs to be community-led through increased participation, where officers are seen as offering guidance in how to progress actions around community priorities. Another highlighted that we need to work towards having more community-led processes as communities know best where support is needed and who needs it most. With that in mind there needs to be a clear understanding around peoples' roles and responsibilities, both from an organisational perspective but also those that can be undertaken by communities. Part of this is also about developing an honest understanding around what leadership looks like (and means) at different levels, i.e. political, organisational/corporate and community.

In terms of planning, many CPPs identified that community planning is subject to a plethora of plans that require a "CP input", all of which seek to involve communities in their development. As a result, we need consider what impact this has on communities and the potential for duplication of effort, i.e. CPPs need to set the conditions for effective participation across the area to inform planning as it happens rather than sporadic engagement each time a new plan is being developed.

There was broad agreement that the introduction of Participatory Budgeting (PB) has introduced a new dynamic to wider participation and engagement. It is viewed as an opportunity for communities to become active citizens and lead on a process from the start rather than be passive recipients of money and services.

However, in implementing PB, one of the regional groups highlighted that there is a potential for it to create competitiveness between community groups (leading to disengagement) and that we need to be aware of this and ensure a more collaborative approach to making connections and support between groups. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure that PB delivers empowerment and is not a mechanism to fund groups who would normally access alternative funding arrangements.

One CPP noted that consideration should be given to ensure that the PB process is made less onerous for officers (in terms of scrutiny and accountability of relatively small sums) to support them in using this approach with communities.

There is a clear need for Community Planning to be more purposeful and to achieve real, positive change for communities. This is highlighted in the Impact Standard of the National Standards for Community Engagement which emphasises the need to ensure that: the 'outcomes the engagement process intended to achieve are met'; 'local outcomes, or services, are improved as a result of the engagement process'; and 'feedback is provided … on how the engagement process has influenced decisions and what has changed as a result'.

Table 5 – Changing Culture and Sharing Power Example

Midlothian CPP: Community Involvement Through Participatory Budgeting

What was the Problem/Issue?

Making a start on participatory budgeting in our target communities making use of the resources available within the community work team to pilot this approach.

What did we as a CPP do?

The community work team piloted participatory budgeting in deprived communities in Midlothian. We received match funding from NHS Lothian Health Promotion and Scottish Government for 3 pilots then a second phase of 3 further pilots on topics decided locally in each of the 3 communities. The team worked hard on developing and reviewing the process to make it as open and as democratic as possible and had an external review after phase 1. Participants' feedback was gathered and short YouTube clips made to present the work to wider CPP and public (online).

What helped us to improve community participation?

There is a good long-standing relationship between the community work team and the third sector and there are ongoing honest conversations. People in the community who have been actively involved in participatory budgeting have been very positive. It has brought a lot of networks together to have important conversations.

What were the barriers to improving community participation?

Unexpected sources of challenge emerged including disagreements internally about this form of participatory budgeting, which used in grant making posed a threat to funding of the voluntary sector because it was seen that it might take away links to policy priorities and evidence of need in using micro funding. Certain partners argued that panels including professional staff could make a more informed decision.

What are we learning?

The complexity of power shifts between community, elected members and the professional staff in council and third sector. We are learning more about Participatory Budgeting. It is intended to be a deliberative process where voting takes place after all voters have been fully informed and engaged with evidence of need, demand and ability to deliver have been understood. In practice this is a very high standard of participation to expect and requires significant amounts of staff resource to deliver leaving questions of long term sustainability. The use of small grants as a pilot has not yet had any impact on the wider expectation of council allocation 1% of the total budget through participatory budgeting model, but has raised the profile of the key challenge which is around a shift in power and control, investment in public engagement and trust in shared decision making approaches.

Our Observations and Reflections

The key themes that emerged from the action learning process ranged from information gathering/sharing, to working relationships with communities, to achieving real impacts for the most disadvantaged communities.

Discussions on information and knowledge seemed to focus largely on the ability and capacity of CPPs to share (statistical) data and intelligence across their systems to identify priorities and allocate resources, but not necessarily to routinely collate knowledge and improve understanding about the quality and impact of community participation by the CPP. Furthermore, it was highlighted by many participants that community engagement is happening all the time and there is a need for partners:

- to share and consider the learning that already exists rather than starting from scratch each time they want to know something, and:

- to better coordinate the community consultations and engagement that are undertaken so they generate learning on multiple topics (rather than individual partners undertaking consultations in silos)

Although there are attempts to collate information across community planning partners on current community engagement processes to reduce duplication and better co-ordinate engagement, current systems and/or a dedicated mechanism to facilitate analysis and shared learning about community participation within and across CPPs is lacking. The development of the CPP Portal was highlighted as a potential vehicle for starting this culture of sharing information, which could complement the move towards CPPs creating their own mechanisms locally to co-ordinate and share practice for community participation.

There is perhaps a sense amongst some CPPs that 'community participation' is something they still 'do to' communities, and there may be benefits in CPPs exploring how they can help to facilitate empowered communities, so they can participate and engage on their own terms.

There needs to be strong buy-in at a CPP board level for ensuring community engagement and participation is supported in a meaningful way, and a clear connect between the activities being undertaking on the ground (and the learning generated from this) and the priorities being set at a CPP Board level. The level of participation in the action learning events from those at CPP Board and Executive levels was lower than that of CPP officers operationally responsible for community engagement and participation. Whilst this is welcome for the purpose of sharing learning between those officers with a high degree of knowledge and expertise about community participation, we were left unsure as to how Board and Executive level members

see their leadership role with regard to community participation. Non-participation in the programme by Board and Executive CPP members will be due to any number of factors, and we are not suggesting it is an indication that they do not play an active role in supporting community participation nor have an interest in learning about the operational challenges involved, however it would have been advantageous to include their perspective in the discussions.

There appears to be an unbalanced power differential between communities and CPPs and a sense that communities still seem to be passive in the process of community planning. This reinforces the importance of building capacity to participate in decision making, not just engage in the development of CPP plans and strategies which can often exclude from scope the things communities are passionate about. Supporting community participation at a grass roots level and incorporating this into higher levels of strategic decision making is a bridging process that could result in benefits for all involved. Quite often the two are too distant and divorced from each other to make appropriate links and connections that would not only improve process outcomes, but impact positively on CPP outcomes. This came through strongly at times with many participants highlighting the disconnect between community and strategic priorities and the need to demonstrate the positive impact for communities of good community planning. There is a need for CPPs to more clearly identify what is changing as a result of community planning processes and what the outcomes of robust community participation are or can be.

Next Steps

There are key strengths to build on from the programme that would facilitate the improvement of community participation by CPPs. This would not only benefit community planning partners and the communities they work with but would be of interest to Scottish Government and other national and local agencies seeking to improve their skills and practice to better work with and within communities.

From the final recall session with CPP participants and other stakeholders to highlight issues raised in the process, we asked what action could be taken by CPPs, for CPPs and with CPPs. A range of actions were identified with key priorities emerging as described below.

'By Us' – suggested actions that CPPs can take themselves:

The top priorities were:

1. Empower and support all levels of public service staff to make decisions and take control – this clearly reflects feelings of lack of power and control particularly at operational level.

2. Be agents of change around participation (have courageous conversations and identify allies within the CPP) – this reflected a feeling that the key people who can drive participation are the people who are actively involved but they need to try and develop this more widely throughout their CPP.

3. Support communities to take risks – this reflected the need to be less risk averse within our community planning processes.

'With Us' (locally) – suggested actions that CPPs can take with others at a local or regional level:

The top priorities were:

1. Remove fear of failure (just try things) – this ties into the risk-taking point made in the previous section.

2. Build alliances across CPPs and have a couple of CPPs take part in action research on how to change culture – this reflects a strong desire amongst the participating CPPs to continue to learn from one another and to maintain the working links that have been established.

3. Recognising that genuine participation benefits people's lives and public services – this strongly supports the views coming through the action learning process about impact and real change.

'For Us' (national level) – suggested actions that national bodies can take to support the local/regional developments as outlined:

The top priorities were:

1. The development of a community participation/skills framework (and associated quality standards) to be embedded in induction, job roles across the board.

2. Support for CPPs to take risks and learn from this – again this reflects the actions outlined in previous sections.

3. Community and CPP views, experiences and information to influence decisions at national (and international) level – this reflects a broad concern about the potential for community planning to be disconnected from wider decision-making processes.

4. Support to develop outcome measures as part of a framework to implement the Community Empowerment Act – there were clear indications from participants that we need to be able to measure and evidence impact of the benefits of community participation in community planning.

Recommendations on next steps that will build on the strengths of the programme are:

• Development/co-production of a resource on community participation for CPPs. This would include this report and learning materials from the programme, continued development of the Innovation Exchange to share examples of community engagement from the programme and to share examples of future engagement from CPPs. Examples should be brief and include contact details so further information could be sought if required.

• Continued networking amongst CPPs with an explicit focus on improving community participation (in their regional clusters or other appropriate geographical groupings).

• Support from national level for continued action learning amongst CPPs on community participation.

• Further development of outcome measures and frameworks that will help CPPs to measure, evidence and demonstrate the impact of community participation on improved outcomes for communities.

References and Links

Innovation Exchange
www.innovationexchange.scot

Local Outcomes Improvement Plans Stock-take — Emerging Themes
www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/community_planning/loip-stocktake-emerging-findings-may2018.pdf

Community Planning after the Community Empowerment Act: The Second Survey of Community Planning Officials in Scotland
http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/community-planning-after-the-community-empowerment-act-second-survey-of-community-planning-officials

Community Involvement in Community Planning — Learning Report
www.scdc.org.uk/s/Community-involvement-in-community-planning-Learning-report.pdf

Community Planning in Scotland
www.cpsupport.scot

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

scdc
scottish community development centre

is.
improvement service