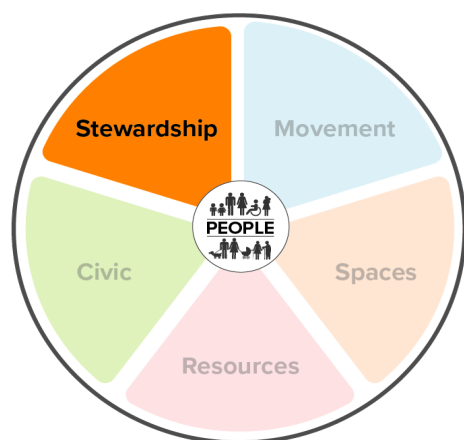


Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme

Ayr Project Town

Influence and Control: Impact on Ayr's Community



Influence and control can have a positive impact on people when everyone is empowered to be involved in a place in which:

- Local outcomes are improved by effective collaborations between communities, community organisations and public bodies.
- Decision making processes are designed to involve communities as equal partners.
- Community organisations co-produce local solutions to issues.
- Communities have increased influence over decisions.
- Democratic processes are developed to be accessible to all citizens.

This is why it is one of Scotland's Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

The evidence tells us ¹ :



A sense of control has been described as “believing that you can influence and shape your own life”.



Designing with the community, rather than for it, makes end-users more likely to feel ownership of, and connection to, a final product.



Lack of control can lead to poorer health outcomes such as increased risk of heart disease, anxiety, depression and stress.



People on lower incomes seem to have a lower sense of control compared to those on higher incomes.



A high sense of purpose has been associated with a reduced risk in all-cause mortality and cardiovascular events.



A sense of control can lead to more empowerment and sense of purpose; being able to influence decisions can strengthen communities.



Empowerment can help to reduce isolation and can be beneficial for mental health and wellbeing.



People with a long-term health condition or disability can feel less empowered in decisions about their neighbourhood.

1. Source: [Evidence Behind Place Standard Tool & Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#)

Indicators for Influence and Control in Ayr²

'I can influence decisions in my local area'.

- 26% of adults in South Ayrshire agree with this statement (2021).
- 44% of adults in South Ayrshire agree that they would like to be more involved in the decisions that their council make that affects their local area (2021).

There are fewer community owned assets in South Ayrshire than in other parts of Scotland; 7 assets from 6 groups (2022).

49.8% voter turnout at 2022 Local Elections in South Ayrshire.

- This is lower than the 2017 turnout.
- Ayr North 39.2% had the lowest voter turnout across South Ayrshire and Ayr West 58.5% had the highest voter turnout.

Ayr had 68.2% voter turnout at the 2021 Scottish Parliament Election.

What we heard from a range of communities, organisations and practitioners in Ayr in 2023

Community Empowerment

There are low numbers of community asset transfers in Ayr and across South Ayrshire, however there are 14 currently in progress across South Ayrshire.

The process can take on average 2-3 years to complete. It was noted by some statutory services that this can be a daunting process for groups and a barrier to community empowerment.

Supporting and enabling community empowerment was highlighted as a focus across service areas in statutory organisations.

Voluntary Action South Ayrshire and the **Community Planning Participation and Empowerment Group** are influential in "putting out the message" of the Community Empowerment Act. Statutory services highlighted a need for improved awareness and education on the Community Empowerment Act and of the benefits of empowering communities for staff working with communities.

A range of local groups and organisations feel that they are supported by statutory services in the process of participatory budgeting and applying for funding.

"If our group did not know about another group taking over the lease of their building, we would not know that this was a possibility as we knew nothing about community asset transfer."

(Community Association, Treasurer)

Participatory budgeting is popular with community groups as people have an opportunity to vote for where funding is distributed.

Communities lack knowledge and understanding of the possibility of community asset transfers. Local groups raised concern around community asset transfer activity including:

- A lack of understanding/awareness of the Community Empowerment Act.
- A lack of understanding of the benefits of community asset transfer.
- Council groups/neighbourhood groups lacking confidence or not having the skills to "take on" the process of community asset transfer.

2. Data Source: [Scottish Household Survey](#); [South Ayrshire Council](#); [Community Ownership in Scotland](#); [The Electoral Commission May 22](#); [Scottish Parliament Elections: 2021](#) - [House of Commons Library](#); [Report on the May 2022 Scottish council elections](#) | [Electoral Commission](#)

Decision making concerns

- Many local community associations/groups feel that they are unable to influence decisions made by councils. Community groups are aware that they have an opportunity to have their say in decisions through being part of a community council/association. However, local communities feel that often their voices are unheard and that their voice is not valued in the decision-making process.
- One local community council who did feel they could influence decisions had developed good relationships and a support network of people within statutory services. Relationship building could be a factor in communities feeling they can influence decisions made by councils.

The need for improved collaboration

Local groups highlighted that they felt supported by statutory services in funding processes and participatory budgeting processes. However, they did not feel they could influence decisions. Improved collaboration between statutory services and local groups could improve relationships that services have with local communities.

Statutory services such as South Ayrshire Council, Thriving Communities and Working for Wallacetown are already engaging well and involving local people in service design and delivery, to identify and develop solutions to local issues. This is encouraging, as all public service organisations have been charged by Scottish Government to address the subject of community asset transfers and not just local authorities.

Collaborative approaches would support designing services which address local issues and reduce inequalities. Particularly in the context of budget constraints, when all partners bring their knowledge, expertise and resources together, much more can be achieved.

*“Community Asset Transfer is complicated, and you need to be well connected and aware of influential people who can support the process.”
(Community Group, Chair)*

Suggested improvements

- Promote the importance of community involvement to local decision making.
- More collaboration between statutory and third sectors and joined up working between council service areas.
- More support to promote community councils, encourage involvement, support recruitment, recognise their statutory role and input into how public funds are spent.
- More support and awareness raising to statutory service staff around the potential benefit of community asset transfers to communities.
- Simplify the language used and improve awareness of support offered to groups in the process of a community asset transfer application.

*“Wallacetown Energy Project is an example of collaborative working between a community group and a range of council services for a project with potential to deliver significant benefits and empowerment to the community.”
(Team Leader, Community Asset Transfer. South Ayrshire Council)*

Communication

There was an ask for improved communications, which included:

- Raising awareness of the benefits of community empowerment.
- Providing accessible information on asset transfers and decision-making processes.
- More signposting to both local and national sources of support for local groups. Particularly in enabling them to build capacity to confidently engage with community empowerment opportunities, such as community asset transfer and participation requests.