

Strengthening Community Councils national seminar

23rd April, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation

Notes from table discussions

Discussion 1:

What do you make of the findings from this review of CCs?

- Need meaningful involvement
- Need to be valued at a senior level of LAs
- Time for a complete reboot in order that more people participate?
- Greater publicity of role of CCs
- Need support to get younger people (and other groups) involved
- Joint forums needed, and sub forums
- A national structure for networking, information and sharing ideas
- Lack of support
- Understanding role of community councillors
- 1973 Act needs to be adhered to
- Chart 9 – 90% thought CCs should have an automatic place on CPPs
- Role and resources available to CCs
- Define and resource what community councils can do better, and more efficiently, than others (public) Is the answer that we are more responsive when delivering on local issues?
- CCs need to find the right balance between ‘doing things’ and being represented in decision-making structures (strategic work).
- Turning local democracy from top-down to bottom-up
- Community planning (representation)
- Credibility
- Transparency and communication (both directions)
- Bigger membership

- Should focus on existing duties like planning – if we can pilot greater powers here and make a tangible difference, then we can use this for making a case to roll out to other processes
- Recognising the power that we already have to influence and working together around this
- A strong mandate is needed (through being democratically elected) and then increase diversity (JS)

Discussion 2: Next steps

- Issues around trust and transparency, and replying to planning lists
- Think about the size of CCs (should be flexible)
- Encourage interest by demonstrating impact, e.g., on enhancing community spirit (missing from report)
- Opportunities in a changing landscape (planning and LGR)
- Pool resources across planning structures, and enable/support CCs to have greater role in this.
- Difficulties engaging with formal structures – need for formalised agreement or concordat between structures and CCs on how they work together
- If starting from scratch would want mechanism that really understands place and natural communities, one that works for communities not agencies.
- Who do we contact? How do we ensure that they are able to respond to CCs and have the right level of knowledge about the agency they work for?
- Reconsider the language of ‘council’
- Gaining recognition through association – example of meeting the CEO of LA
- Need clerk services – someone who can support the work of CC and knows how to pull things together and how to word funding applications and navigate policy
- Need representation on structures
- There is an onus on CCs to input into LGR
- Awareness of Scheme of Establishment and how these can be shaped
- Performance measurements

- National elections across Scotland for CCs, outwith other elections in order to raise profile
- CC awards
- Planning – assistance and info. A linked system that is flexible
- Planning Jury idea – one participant agreed to send more on this idea.
- Community council role in Business Improvement Districts
- Training package, e.g. PB support
- Increase local authorities' and other public bodies' understanding of CEA

Update on LGR

The listening phase is now complete and the Democracy Matters report will be published next month – the aspiration for change has been heard clearly across country-wide conversations.

The next phase is what we do about it – the so what. If the ambition is for greater decision making at a community level how do we go about this?

Final remarks

- The importance of digital for community councils – including digital methods of engaging with communities through dialogue and deliberation.
- Is it worth considering having larger CCs in terms of membership?
- Can CCs have more of a community organiser role? Would need support for this.

Further views given at event, or by people who weren't able to attend:

- CCs want to change for their communities rather than for public agencies.
- National structures need looked at
- Link together with other CCs in other places on shared issues
- Although important to include all voices where possible, representation of diversity can also come through experience, such as being a carer or other roles working with people with protected characteristics

- A large call for training around planning. (See <https://communityknectdotnet.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/lildem-stakeholder-report-october-2017.pdf>)
- There is lack of trust and transparency
 - Need evidence-based community planning
 - Should be transparency around community asset transfers
 - Could have weekly planning updates (for which there should be a right to reply)
- Rules about CCs being statutory consultees need updated because for <50 dwellings, CCs have to ask for this right within 1 week, and CCs meet monthly!)