



Survey of Community Councils: June 2023

Overview

We opened our Survey of Edinburgh Community Councils in mid-May, inviting a response by late-June with an assessment of community councils' general well-being, span of interests and competencies.

We felt it important to look to make this assessment and for the picture to be shared. (Names have not been divulged.)

Now, we publish the results. They make for mixed reading. They will shape, I think, how you approach the forthcoming City of Edinburgh Council consultation on the *Review of Edinburgh Community Council Scheme* and the questions you pose of the Council itself.

If there is a central message, it is to put both City of Edinburgh Council's *Governance* team and its *Community Engagement and Empowerment* team to the test in their declared commitment of support for local communities and their community councils. Push them on open dialogue and dependable communication. Pressure them for help with rebuild where your community council is faltering. Beyond that, persuade Elected Councillors to stand demonstrably with their communities on important issues and to lower the shields of 'party lines' that can on occasion divide them.

1. It's not a great environment.

Community council elections are due to take place in May 2024. A Community Council Scheme Review is in its very early stages – the last was in 2019 - along with a Boundary Review. Given the projected growth of the city and the scale of boundary development, the present community council structure could see significant change.

A link to the current City of Edinburgh Council **Scheme for Community Councils** ('the Scheme') is carried in **Appendix 1**.

The pace of change in the city is rising. There's a lot happening around us. Yet, as community forums, community councils are seeing evident 'engagement fatigue', diminished public interest in what they do and falling numbers of still-active, still-committed, community councillors themselves.

There is a natural ebb over the electoral term. However, the prospects next year for a healthy new intake of elected and representative community councillors look thinner. Community councils *are* struggling. That's a view held by some Elected Councillors, by some inside City of Edinburgh Council (CEC), their principal dialogue-counterpart, and it's a conclusion drawn from this Survey exercise.

Here are some of the reasons we're given: Loss of capacity (people) to deal with an expanding in-tray; lack of capacity (admin, IT) to run and to promote the community body effectively; pressure on 'community-life' from work-life and home-life; disenchantment with what is achieved and achievable; frustration at the often dulled response offered by CEC to what community councils have to say; an element of 'powerlessness' in the face of delay in the emergence of 'locality community planning' promises; a lack of 'credibility' in the community.

All of this makes for a weak foundation for the 'vibrant local democracies' championed by Scot Gov.

2. What were we looking for?

We wanted a clear picture of community councils' 'health', their 'mood' and their current 'reach', the effective span of their interests and activities. They were invited to assess this across fourteen areas of active community interest – each of these areas impacting on people in their community to one degree or another. They were asked to score their capacity to monitor and to act as issues arise, at local level and in a wider city context. As key representatives of their community, what are the city's community councils capable of handling and with what measure of confidence?

3. The backdrop

The Edinburgh Partnership (EP) is the community planning partnership for the city. CEC is an anchor member. EP's ambitious community planning framework, founded on four Locality Community Planning Partnerships (LCPPs) and a structure of (thirteen) Neighbourhood Networks (NNs), is way behind schedule. Community councils are meant to have a core participatory role in this framework, at least in principle. The space for them is there to be occupied. However, delay and lack of clarity leaves them stranded. Weak definition of where they can take a lead (and where they can't) leaves them exasperated. Poor communication lines with CEC leaves some angry. CEC's new *Community Engagement and Empowerment* initiative, led by Andrew Field, promises repair. We wait to see. (**Appendix 2**)

4. Where does that leave Community Councils?

In overall terms, Edinburgh community councils are depleted in active participation and resource. They are thin on financial support, unsure of the integrity of their working relationship with CEC and uncertain of what is expected of them in locality planning. They see a heavy agenda of consultations across a wide range of community and city issues. In the past year, some community councils have put up the shutters. In this Survey, a few community councils do report they are in robust form, in the round. Many, however, tell of 'gaps', dilapidation, strains and urgencies.

What incentives are there to commit to a community council, with the 2024 elections in prospect? What would make the idea 'compelling'? That is the challenge.

The Scot Gov vision of 'a different democratic future' for communities, to be distilled from the *Democracy Matters* conversations, was overtaken by Covid events. There is now the hint of a

delayed reboot of *Democracy Matters Phase 2*. (**Appendix 3**) That might prove to be a decent draw in our urban setting, but it's a long road.

More pertinently, a credible invitation to *partner* CEC and the EP Board in shaping outcomes to local community challenges, outcomes that have a *local stamp* to them - that would be a meaningful incentive. New-found CEC means to fund those outcomes and to add stronger financial support for community councils to that end - that would clearly help, but it looks very unlikely to happen.

For those members still committed to making the community council construct mean something, the near future looks to be as wearing as the recent past. For those community councils under real strain, it's maybe time to work a little bit more cohesively in their immediate locality and to see what can be salvaged of the personal endeavours that have gone in to keeping the boat afloat in recent years.

Let's take a look at some Survey detail.

5. The Response Rate:

44 community councils (CCs) were contacted. Wester Hailes and Craigmillar are stood down. West Pilton / West Granton and Drumbrae replied to say they were in abeyance. Up to four requests were made of the other 40 before we gathered 28 responses. The detail is kept confidential.

| Locality >> | North-West | North-East | South-West | South-East |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| CCs replying = 28 | 8 from 13 | 4 from 8 | 7 from 12 | 5 from 6 |
| | | | | 4 from 5 in the city centre |

6. Public Activity: Meetings per year:

| Frequency | 11 to 12 | 9 to 10 | 7 to 8* | 5 to 6 |
|---------------|----------|---------|---------|--------|
| # of CCs (28) | 4 | 20 | 1 | 3 |

Ten to twelve meetings over the year; that is good going. Add on set-up and reporting time for the Secretary and write-up time for 'standard' Planning and Licensing issues just to start with.

*This respondent 'doubles up' with closed committee meetings in addition, something probably mirrored in a number of other cases.

7. Public Activity: Preferred Meeting Format

| | In Person | Hybrid | Alternate Person and Screen | Mostly Screen |
|---------------|-----------|--------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| # of CCs (28) | 13 | 10 | 2 | 3 |

There has been a move back towards face-to-face. Hybrid works too but it can be awkward to set up in terms of IT. Hybrid does widen scope for regular and convenient access by members of the public, as long as the IT connections hold good.

8. Leadership: Office Bearers (OB)

| | North-West | North-East | South-West | South-East |
|----------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Full Set of OB | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| Lacking C | | 1 | | |
| Lacking DC | 3 | | 4 | 2 |
| Lacking S | 1* | 1 | | |
| Lacking DC & T | | | | 1 |
| Lacking DC & S | | | | 1 |
| Totals | 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 |

Full set = C (Chair), DC (Deputy Chair), T (Treasurer), S (Secretary) *Minute Secretary in place.

On the surface, this outcome looks quite robust, though it can't speak for those community councils (12) that didn't acknowledge or respond at all to the questionnaire request sent to Chairs and Secretaries.

Gaps are covered in practice by 'doubling up'. One real ongoing threat to community council viability is where the admin / secretarial function can't be dependably covered. Minute-taking is a big 'disincentive'. 'Minute Secretaries' are a solution, used by some, being considered by others. That maybe still leaves the job of editing down from a close-to-verbatim record. (Transcription from recorded event is not widely-used, maybe not surprisingly.)

The current Scheme asks for the appointment of an Engagement Officer alongside Chair, Treasurer and Secretary as Office Bearers. Only a few community council respondents appear to have someone in post there, although all are aware of 'engagement'. However, engagement can be tenuous concept, difficult to 'pin down' and a real struggle in the round.

9. Community council current strength in terms of community councillors attending against full complement:

By size of catchment / boundary area, the Community Council Scheme provides for a full complement of community councillors, of the order of 15, 18, 21 or 24, with two-thirds 'elected members' and one-third in place as local group 'nominated representative members'. Attrition and withdrawal are to be expected, but commitment and delivery become tougher without 'reinforcement'.

| Fraction of Members attending versus full complement | North-West | North-East | South-West | South-East |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 2/3 or better | 4 | | | 1 |
| around 1/2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| closer to 1/3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Totals | 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 |

On the face of it, this is not a great picture. Only 5 of the 28 respondents are running with regular community councillor attendee numbers close to their original allocation. The 'closer to 1/3' group may be five, six or seven people in regular attendance, fewer on occasion. That can work for a short while but it compromises the intention and spirit of 'community endeavour'. A community council 'run by a handful of people' lacks credibility and then validity.

10. How do community councils rate their coverage and capacity to act on community issues arising in the city?

An expanding Edinburgh is a city with growing pains, notably along the North-West boundaries. Suburb becomes urban; village becomes suburb; dislocation becomes standard; net zero overlays everything; council money is tight; communities feel the strain.

Community councils are supposed to be on the front-line; engaging, 'reaching-out', alert to community issues, the buffer between community and CEC; the community leader when the community has something to say, has a message to deliver.

The Survey asked community councils to judge their capacity to do all this, across a wide list of issues and areas of potential involvement. Edinburgh is a sizeable place. A lot happens here. Well-resourced and well-functioning community councils should be able to act 'across the board'.

11. The scorecard on 'capacity to act':

| | |
|--|---------|
| Very strong; with access to expertise; | score 5 |
| Strong; can respond in good detail; | score 4 |
| Good; can give firm attention; | score 3 |
| Patchy; nominal attention only; | score 2 |
| Very weak; next to zero. | score 1 |

12. How community councils rated themselves

| Area / Activity / Issue | Average Score across 28 CCs | Number of CCs rating a 4 or 5 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Planning | 3.9 | 18 |
| Licensing | 2.6 | 6 |
| Policing, Public Safety, ASB | 2.8 | 4 |
| Social Care | 1.9 | 5 |
| Health & Medical Care | 1.7 | 1 |
| Housing | 2.2 | 6 |
| Poverty & Deprivation | 1.7 | 2 |
| Primary & Secondary Schooling | 2.4 | 6 |
| College & University | 1.9 | 3 |
| Roads, Footpaths, Mobility | 3.3 | 12 |
| Traffic & Public Transport | 3.2 | 12 |
| Waste, Cleansing & Recycling | 2.9 | 6 |
| Net Zero, Climate & Environment | 2.4 | 4 |
| | 3.0 | 9 |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Direct engagement in specific local issues | | |
|---|--|--|

Planning is a standout here. Eighteen community councils see themselves as well-equipped in that area. A community council takes a hit when it loses a Planning Convenor, as has happened in two or three cases in recent months. A strong capacity to review Planning issues points to scope for opinions to be exchanged, questions asked, advice to be shared across community councils, in the right circumstances; an area where we could be working better together.

The same might be said on Roads, Footpaths & Mobility, and on Traffic & Public Transport, where 12 community councils believe they are well-placed.

Elsewhere, however, there is a ‘softness’ in other areas that is unsettling, at least on the surface. Put another way, if part of a community council’s job is to hold CEC to account across CEC’s wide portfolio of activities, then in a strongly-resourced, strongly-committed community council setting, we would be looking for a broader array of ‘strong competencies’ across the board. In practice, the ‘softness’ in resource-to-hand is undermining members’ commitment, eroding the motivation to put in the time and compromising community council relevance.

13. How is the time spent?

An EACC November 2021 survey asked community councils to rank their ‘main concerns’ at the time. Twenty-three community councils responded. Here is a snapshot of what they said then:

‘The dominant issues for CCs ranked as follows:

Top Tier: Planning; well ahead of

Second Tier: Parks and Greenspace; Roads, Waste Collection; Traffic Congestion; Public Space Management; Housing;

Third Tier: Public Transport; Walking and Pavements; Health and Social Care; Cycling and Cycle Lanes;

Fourth Tier: Carbon Neutrality; Council Services; Pollution; Tourism; followed by Festivals and Events; Heritage;

Low Level: Deprivation, Vandalism, Biodiversity, Business Recovery and Development, Licensing; Controlled Parking Zones.’

In this exercise (June 2023), we asked what took up the time. The response is shaped in part by how many of a community council’s members are ‘engaged and active’ and where their own interests and expertise lie. Equally, the response reflects the ‘issues’ that have landed on the community council’s own doorstep; some can be responded to relatively quickly; others can drag on for months or years. It’s this latter group that tests a community council’s resource and resolve; think Trams, new developments along the Waterfront and the Western Boundary, the push for stronger Public Transport connections, Student Housing, pushback against community facility closures and pushback against short-term lets.

In summary, Planning-related issues dominate, followed by Traffic & Public Transport, and Roads, Footpaths & Mobility, followed in turn by Waste, Cleansing & Recycling, and Licensing; then there follows a string of ‘everything else’.

There is another big stand-out, reported by a city-centre community council, dominated by the routine' of a night-time / short-term-let economy, one that crests with an up-to-three-month Fringe 'season' of 'set-up, performance and de-rig'. Reporting it is drained of members, this particular community council sees itself as overtaken by the challenges arising from the scope in the area for 'relentless disruption'; trying to push back against 'large funded-organisations often either ignoring community views or running campaigns directly opposed to them' (with short-term-lets given as one example); in this way, it wins more and more workload in return.

Given the heavy pace of consultations, alongside the rotation of traffic or planning or anti-social behaviour or other neighbourhood issues, and with long-running topics such as big local developments sitting on top of that in-tray, it can't be a surprise that undercurrents of strain are widespread.

14. Do all community councils feel that way?

It depends who you speak to, or don't. Twelve community councils couldn't or wouldn't fashion a response to a short questionnaire; this includes one city-centre community council right in the thick of it, ostensibly well-established and vocal on occasion. This group of 12 was invited to participate four times. Disinterested, disorganised, dispirited; that is the impression given in this exercise; it's not very encouraging. On the other hand, the community councils that did respond gave this picture.

15. Assessment of present CC 'health' or well-being:

| # CCs reporting: | North-West | North-East | South-West | South-East |
|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Good to Strong | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Decent | 5 | | 3 | |
| Fair | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Below Par | | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Weak to Fragile | 1 | | | 2 |
| Total (28) | 8 | 4 | 7 | 9 |

On this scorecard, when asked to assess their individual community council 'health' – this in terms of their ability to act on / assign attention to topics / issues as they arise (regular or one-off) – some responses were surprisingly bullish. Sixteen respondents consider they are in a decent-to-good-to-strong position. Yet, only three of them are working with a tally of active members more than half-way towards their full complement. Maybe a sense of adversity concentrates the mind and pumps up the commitment of those 'rearguard members'.

However, that only goes so far. At the 'weak to fragile' end, the drift away in participation brought out assessments such as '*holding on by fingertips*', '*trying to remain functioning until the elections*' and '*don't think anyone will be standing again*' for election. Among those community councils in apparent better heart, the detail is still revealing:

Status 'adequate but not secure';

'Motivation not high due to amount of work and the lack of success in "making a difference"';

'Difficult to get community councillors to take on some roles';

*'Decline in numbers and capacity to pick up on local issues;
 'Very real fear we will not have many candidates for election next year';
 'Struggle to recruit a key issue';
 'Capability will be significantly diminished in Q4 2023 without effort to replenish members and skills / expertise'.*

This is not a bright picture.

16. What does this tell us?

Twenty-eight community councils subscribed to this Survey. I'll take it that the majority of non-respondents face the same basket of issues with a now-smaller number of active members and they look to tackle their agendas as best they can. From those who did respond, I'd say the following:

This is an uphill struggle. The pace of change in the city; its growth and the changing environment; shifts in demography; CEC's comprehensive plans for the future – each of these chapters in Edinburgh's current story threatens a basket load of challenges for city community councils.

They are constituted as the 'local democracy' pressure pad between community and the local authority; answerable to both; expected to be prompt in response; frequently viewed as a 'tick box' formality, thin on resource and structure; often seriously engaged in long-running consultations and project participations; easily drawn into heavy time commitments; disillusioned when evidently 'knocked back'; putting in the hours for free and prone to wondering what the 'candle is worth'. (*'It can feel like a full-time job'.*)

As this community council term moves into its closing months before the 2024 election round, active member participation has fallen away (attrition and fading motivation). The old rote of 'lack of diversity' (on age cohort, youth, protected characteristics) is easily drawn to the fore. However, 'outward engagement' is patently not easy. Many people who wish to be 'active' in the community are spoilt for choice. Community councils are not a 'must join'; they are not 'compelling'. The hard fact is that the present band of active community councillors represents in good part the cadre of city residents who have the time, financial freedom and drive actually to commit to what they are doing here, in this particular civic arena. They self-select, in a sense. It is maybe as good as you will get without bringing in salaried help to power-up the organisation and a budget to 'really change things' so that there is a 'really engaging' story to tell.

Reviewing what respondents had to say, I stand back to applaud the endeavour. I would step forward to argue for professional support.

17. What would make for a better picture? How to improve community council 'functionality'?

We asked respondents what would make an early and positive difference in their 'ability to function well ("good or strong capacity to act") across a reasonable range of community issues'.

- Reinforce what is there: Stronger participation; more active, committed members to put in the time and energy needed to front for local community issues; people with the experience / skills needed to close up the gaps.
- Look around: Tap into expertise / pointers elsewhere; e.g., the *Cockburn Association* and *Planning Democracy* on planning and civic issues. Sound out opinions in neighbouring community councils. Talk with any and all community and amenity groups in the area; declare a presence. Look at how *The Improvement Service* (TIS) or the *Scottish Community Development Council* (SCDC) might be able to help, with free-to-access material or specific training. (**Appendix 4**)
- Invest in comms: Spend a little to upgrade the website and keep it current, and lively. Find the right social media platform and find the knack of using it creatively. If your community council is hitting the spot there, share your experience with others. Promote and share your content. Couple that with looking to make community council meetings themselves more interesting and dynamic, looking forward more than back. More pertinently, if you have the expertise and some time to offer pointers or advice in this area, let us know; we can pass that on.
- Make better use of Elected Councillors: Elected Councillor participation in community council meetings is generally good-to-strong, and 'highly significant'. But some community councils feel an element of 'lip service' is paid here. Insist on good Elected Councillor attendance. Elected Councillor follow-through or delivery of results in response to issues raised can be patchy and tardy. Elected Councillors maybe need to be 'pursued' a bit more purposefully, to be made quite clear on what the community questions are, to share more on what is in their own postbags, communication lines and newsletters. Community councils should look to break through the shields of 'party lines' that Elected Councillors can draw around themselves. If CEC as the principal counterpart of a community council is 'unresponsive' for whatever reason, Elected Councillors for the ward are surely the lever lean on, the lever to push, purposefully.
- Build better inroads with the public: Build engagement with local businesses, with local school councils, faith and amenity groups, with student halls of residence and community volunteer groups. Invite them along to meetings. (All of that goes back to good communication lines again.) Demonstrate engagement by putting Public Open Forum sessions at the top of community council meeting agendas, not the end; put them next to the Police Reports, if you have them. (See next section.) Broadcast engagement success: '*The CC is viewed as pointless if the opinions of the local community are (routinely) ignored.*' 'Wins' count; make sure people hear about them.
- Put a marker down, along with your neighbouring community councils, in your Neighbourhood Networks: Building a framework of four *Locality Community Planning Partnerships* around the city, supported by Neighbourhood Networks within each Locality, is a long-delayed ambition of the *Edinburgh Partnership* and CEC. However, it is a renewed ambition. A suite of matching *Locality Improvement Plans* is envisaged by

end-year. Community councils have a recognised role to play in Neighbourhood Networks, although, yes, it's *'something else to be done'*. (**Appendix 5a, 5b**)

- Relationships, relationships: I close this section at the most sensitive, maybe the most difficult, part of the whole picture – the relationship between community councillors on the one hand and CEC officers and departmental officials on the other.

There is a new starting-point, as mentioned earlier – the revitalised *Community Engagement and Empowerment* function, to sit *'at the heart of Council service planning and delivery'*. The CEC commitment is in the very wording. It heightens expectations, which certainly need a reset. Will it be pivotal?

Community council fatigue, exasperation and disenchantment breeds gripe. A low 'win rate' demotivates. On the other hand, 'local democracy' is not a one-way street. The administration is elected to 'administer' through its 'civil servants'. Some element of tension is inevitable.

While some respondents felt there wasn't too much of a problem, others were much more pointed in their criticism. In broad terms, the community council–CEC dialogue must improve.

'Cuts' and 'fiscal stringency' are a threadbare excuse for not listening, never mind not hearing. Clearly, additional funding support for community councils would be well-received. Bar that, could CEC offer some element of 'in-kind' support on website, on-line meeting and other IT areas? Are there media and other subscriptions which community councils could 'share'? Can CEC bring back training modules on Planning 101 and other core competencies?

Then there is the recognition of the fact that (self) interests don't always coincide. Community councillors necessarily vie with Council Officers, who drive (at least in part) a mandated political agenda, and with Council Officials who just want to get their job done, with their greater grasp of the detail to hand, without 'amateurs sticking their oar in'.

Defusing the frequent feeling of exasperation expressed by community councils; being seen to 'listen, accept and adjust'; willingly applying the help and resource to deal with specific problems in specific areas (reference the city-centre community council above); having named CEC Officials dedicated to work with community councils in agreed areas; ensuring that matters raised in earnest by community councils are logged as real concerns and are owed a timeous response.

All of the foregoing form the strands of demonstrable active engagement required of Andrew Field's *Community Engagement and Empowerment* programme. We must wait to see.

On the broader calls by a few community councils for (unspecified) delegated legal authorities, moving from right-to-be-consulted to right-to-act; that is a deeper question for Scot Gov and the re-emerging *Democracy Matters* conversations. As one respondent offered: *'The change needs to come from Holyrood and needs to be part of a general wish to devolve real power to local communities'*. Of course, the dimensions to such a development will vary widely between urban, suburban and more rural communities.

18. What about the Police?

Policing, Public Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour issues are high on every community's watchlist. Active Police reports at community council meetings were high on the agenda until Covid and a contemporaneous shift in emphasis where Edinburgh community policing procedures were reshaped to allow for strengthened operational competence in specialist capabilities. (**Appendix 6a**)

'Police Community Newsletters' don't give the community-specifics and the level of detail sought. They are patchy. It's felt it is difficult to get hold of relevant information; *'It's virtually impossible to discover what's going on'*. Visible gaps in local coverage of misdemeanour and criminal offences serve to undermine community council credibility and standing. It's a serious matter.

Take a look at your Edinburgh 'Locality' (**Appendix 6b**) as covered by Police Scotland. Look to see if you can establish 'What's happening' near you. Maybe *Edinburgh's Local Policing Plan 2023-26* and, in particular, *Strategic Outcomes 2 and 3* hold the key (**Appendix 6c**). Here the talk is of 'key milestones', 'raising awareness', maximising 'opportunities for community engagement at a citywide and locality level'. There is a point that is being missed, I fear; the desirability of the delivery of community policing news direct to the community in a 'traditional' manner, or close to it.

There doesn't appear to be a simple button to push here. If there is, it's most likely in the realm of posts by the police on social media, absolutely important in itself. Yet, tailored police reports at community level, especially when led by officer presence at community council meetings, are highly valued. Continue to lean into this one, underscore the issue with Elected Councillors and please share with the rest of us any breakthroughs you make on bringing back decent community police reporting coverage.

19. What about the EACC itself?

EACC is a communication bridge across community councils. Not all of them see it that way or choose to be in contact. Some see EACC as an irrelevance. EACC does have goodwill behind it, but the bridge would be stronger and more effective if more people participated in making use of it.

EACC is *not* 'the' appointed or designated representative body of Edinburgh Community Councils – that isn't a description assumed by, assigned to or bestowed upon EACC. In practice, of course, it can offer 'a' practical representative function. What it learns of relevance to community councils is passed on. What is of import to community councils can be collectively

conveyed to CEC or to the Edinburgh Partnership or to other parties, if community councils want that collective voice to be aired.

When it comes to an individual community council's part in the scheme of things, the bottom line is that the community council itself is the statutory body and the Governance Division at City of Edinburgh Council is the direct counterparty. Every community council has to keep that communication line with CEC open. Every community council has to keep its conversations with CEC current. The *Community Engagement and Empowerment* initiative, now underway and led by Andrew Field, works to put communities 'at the heart of Council service planning and delivery'. That is what has been said. It represents a reset button; use it.

EACC itself is a 'trade body', a liaison group – it will work as community councils together ask it to work. Like community councils themselves, though, it too needs a stronger platform as well as a more secure financial footing. For the moment, we can look to get on with things. There is much to be done.

20. In conclusion

Community councils own the role to 'act as a key voice for individuals and groups in their local area' (**Appendix 5a**). However, as expressed by a respondent to this Survey:

'If community councils are perceived as mere talking shops who command little respect from public authorities, they will remain unattractive and steadily decay towards irrelevance'.

That about sums it up. It's up to you as members of your community council to decide how to move on that. CEC *Governance* and CEC *Community Engagement and Empowerment* teams are committed to support. Test them on that. Let us know what you think and how you get on. Along the way, how about looking to make the EACC bridge – from local communities to one another and to City Chambers - broader and better?

Ken Robertson
EACC Secretary
August 2023

Appendix 1

CEC Scheme for Community Councils

[Notice of meeting and agenda \(edinburgh.gov.uk\)](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news-and-events/notice-of-meeting-and-agenda)

Appendix 2

The backdrop

The last Scot Gov-mandated Review of Community Councils was in 2019. Around the same time, the *Edinburgh Partnership*, as the community planning partnership for the city, completed a review and consultation of its structure and governance. This delivered a model designed to strengthen 'partnership working and community influence and participation'. It provides (*inter alia*) for 'partnership arrangements at locality and neighbourhood levels', by way of four *Locality Community Planning Partnerships* (LCPPs) and a structure of (thirteen) *Neighbourhood Networks* (NNs).

The NN constituency of interested ‘stakeholders’ is wide – listed as Community Councils, Elected Members, Faith Groups, Friends of the Parks Groups, Parent Councils, Registered Tenants Associations, Residents Associations, Third Sector Organisations. The proposal was that NNs be established in April 2019. Currently, the live NN framework lags well behind the ambition of four years ago.

In November 2020, *Audit Scotland* prepared for the Accounts Commission a ‘*Best Value Assurance Report*’ on CEC. At that time, it was ‘unclear on how neighbourhood networks are to operate across the four localities’. It was recorded that ‘community council representatives (had expressed) a need for greater clarity on how community councils should engage with the Local Community Planning Partnerships’. Outwith the North-West Locality (for the most part), these uncertainties remain.

The Audit Scotland Report noted that the ‘*council recognises that the pace of change in improving community engagement has been slow. Community engagement is not embedded in the council’s day-to-day work and is not yet an integral part of service improvement and delivery.*’ That said, the reach and depth of engagement ‘envisioned’, across hard-to-reach, migrant and minority groups, are challenging objectives.

Community councils are coloured by the same critical observations and difficulties, and are diminished in the eyes of some in consequence. However, this Survey suggests there can be little surprise in their failure to capture the heights of best community participation practice, given the ‘patchy’ backdrop against which they strive to work.

The move by CEC over the past 12 months to promote the revitalised *Community Engagement and Empowerment* function (led by Andrew Field, and to sit ‘at the heart of Council service planning and delivery’) promises to change the community participation environment. The aim is to deliver from the outset within the new *Locality Improvement Plans (LIPs) 2023-2028*. However, these community conversations are also dragging their feet, against the target date of end-2023 for submission of the LIPs to the Edinburgh Partnership.

Appendix 3

[Democracy Matters - local governance review: phase 2 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) (March 2021)

[Democracy Matters - phase 2 — Communities Channel Scotland \(communityscot.org.uk\)](#) (June 2021)

[Community empowerment - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#) (current)

Appendix 4

The Improvement Service – the ‘go to’ organisation for Local Government Improvement in Scotland.

[Improvement Service | Improvement Service](#)

The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) – We believe communities matter.

[SCDC - We believe communities matter](#)

Appendix 5a

Edinburgh Partnership and Neighbourhood Networks

[faqs \(edinburghpartnership.scot\)](#)

Appendix 5b

EP and Community Plan 2022-2028

[Edinburgh Partnership Community Plan 2018 28 Master v.2.pdf](#)

Appendix 6a

[\(Policing in Scotland has been radically reformed – all UK forces can learn from us | Iain Livingstone | The Guardian March 2022\)](#)

Appendix 6b

[Edinburgh - Police Scotland](#)

Appendix 6c

[edinburgh-local-policing-plan-2023-26.docx \(live.com\)](#)

END