

# **A review of Local Area Partnerships and the Community Fund in Scottish Borders**

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# 1. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This study was widely targeted at those groups and individuals active in community activity in the Scottish Borders. A significant proportion of those individuals took part but its conclusions should be used as a basis for further dialogue. What is clear is that despite strong desire for meaningful community involvement in decision making, there are significant concerns about opportunities for participation via the Area Partnerships and the operation of the Community Fund.

These clearly suggest that while people want to be more involved, change is required to secure people's commitment by strengthening the arrangements. This includes a number of important overarching themes essential to growing effective empowerment which strongly suggests that the partnership structures and funding approach cannot be viewed in isolation.

Below is a summary of key findings and recommendations.

## 1.1 The Area Partnerships Findings

- There is general support for the Area Partnerships as an improvement on local Area Forums but people raised significant design flaws.
- There are positive responses to changes in the way dialogue was facilitated in relation to discussing the draft locality plan. Although some people like these approaches more than others.
- Issues such as representativeness, influencing the agenda, how meetings are run and how issues are progressed need to be addressed.
- There is widespread concern about the extent that the partnerships tackle inequality at present. However, there are shared partner aspirations to do this.
- CPP formal partners view the Area Partnerships as opportunities to share information and co-ordinate activity. But mostly see limited evidence of meaningful community involvement.
- There is a need to respond to concerns about the size of the boundaries. There is a wider context for participation with other organisations already existing who should be playing a greater role in the Area Partnerships either at the meetings or by feeding in other ways.
- Area Partnerships need to link more effectively to engagement processes such as Community Learning Partnerships, town master planning and community led action planning.
- Making and sustaining these links effectively requires resources for capacity building addressing inequality.

<b>Summarised Recommendations</b> (see page 33 for full description)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These findings should be used by the Council, its partners and community reps to strengthen the design of Area Partnership structures.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ownership of Area Partnerships should be broadened beyond the Council itself with more explicit roles for communities and other Community Planning Partners.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings should have more input from community reps in setting the agenda and making decisions alongside other partners.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action to make the Partnerships more responsive to inequality should be implemented.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities, staff and elected members should have access to training in empowerment policy and practice issues.</li> </ul>

## 1.2 The Community Fund Findings

There was a recognition that the fund was in the early stages of implementation and that there was therefore limited experience to base conclusions.

- There is a need to further promote and clarify the Community Fund's overall purpose, criteria, application and decision-making processes.
- There is also a need to fully clarify the relationships between the Community Fund and participatory budgeting.
- Many respondents felt that community representatives should be involved in decision making.
- There is very limited support for integrating the Village Halls and Community Council grants into the Community Fund at this time and a general belief that aspects of the current systems are working well.

<b>Summarised Recommendations</b> (see page 42 for full description)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose and criteria of the Fund should be further clarified and promoted following discussion with communities and partners on how best to achieve this.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current approach to participatory budgeting in the Borders should be clarified and opportunities for community involvement identified.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The role of community reps in making decisions on Community Fund applications should be clarified, strengthened and consistently applied.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building support for groups bidding for the Fund should be more widely available.</li> </ul>

## 1.3 Overarching themes

- Promotion of the overall vision for empowerment and the current and potential role of the Area Partnerships and Community Fund, within this, is needed.
- There is a continuing desire to participate in improving communities and shaping services and enthusiasm for community empowerment by everyone

we engaged with. There are differences in how to achieve it, although there are many common aims.

- There is a strong view that available capacity building support needs to be strengthened to fully realise the potential of community empowerment including participation in Area Partnerships.
- Empowerment enabling cultures and behaviour amongst partners will be a key pre-requisite for success. Conscious planning to support Elected Members, officers and community members to develop more constructive relationships is therefore needed.
- Sharing accurate knowledge of empowerment enhancing legislation, other empowering policy and frameworks such as the National Standards for Community Engagement is viewed as important to developing shared goals.
- Many participants feel that the current arrangements do not adequately address inequalities concerns. There is therefore a view that any strengthening of the Area Partnerships, of how resources for communities are targeted and distributed, must seek to improve this situation.

<b>Summarised Recommendations</b> (see page 44 for full description)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve how CCB support is planned, resourced and targeted and involve other CPP partners in assessing and meeting CCB needs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt Audit Scotland Principles for Community Empowerment and involve local communities in developing scrutiny arrangement for empowerment locally.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and learn from best practice in community empowerment across Scotland and develop local learning opportunities to share these lessons.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and address factors which affect how inequality is addressed in the area partnerships and other CPP structures and develop actions to improve the situation.</li> </ul>

## Next Steps

<b>Summarised Recommendations</b> (see page 52 for full description)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a working group consisting of local representatives, Elected Members and officers, drawing on the findings to plan appropriate action.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate event designed for local people to feedback the results of this review.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The working group should consider whether there are implications for the current locality plans.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify, audit and promote existing opportunities for engagement and empowerment as part of an ongoing improvement plan linked to the CPPs' aims and responding to the recent Best Value Review.</li> </ul>

## **2. Introduction**

Scottish Borders Council commissioned SCDC to contribute an independent perspective to its review of the operation of local participation structures and funding arrangements with a view to strengthening these where required. The findings will complement the Council's wider review of related issues including budget discussions linked to resourcing community empowerment and the review of its support to community councils locally.

Although the primary brief for the review was to review the Area Partnerships and the Community Fund, a wider set of issues, which many participants saw as essential for successful community empowerment, emerged strongly from the conversations. These are discussed in section seven of the report and, in summary, it was felt that strengthening the partnership structures must take these wider cross-cutting issues into account to successfully deliver their wider aims.

In producing this report, we have used a number of abbreviations to avoid repetition of the names of organisations or key structures in some parts the document. These are:

**SBC – Scottish Borders Council**

**APs – Area Partnerships**

**CF – The Community Fund**

**PB – Participatory Budgeting**

**CPP – The Community Planning Partnership**

**LOIP – Local Outcome Improvement Plan**

**CCs – Community Councils**

**CCB – Community Capacity Building**

**SCDC – Scottish Community Development Centre**

### **3. Aims of the work**

The Scottish Borders Council wished to undertake community engagement to seek the views of local stakeholders on the role of Area Partnerships. It also wished to review the new Community Fund introduced in April 2019, including how it operates and the future proposed integration of funding for community councils, local festivals and village halls. The work sought to explore local views on how well individuals, community groups and other partners thought the Area Partnerships operated.

As the fieldwork progressed, it was clear from an early stage that these aims stimulated discussion on how to improve community involvement in local decision making more generally and this is reflected in the findings.

The opportunity to be involved in the consultation has been widely promoted by Scottish Borders Council and was open to all members of Scottish Borders communities. It was marketed via:

- All 67 operational Community Councils in the area.
- A local social media campaign and media releases to the local press.
- 295 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector /Community groups identified through the Council's databases and via the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector interface.
- 29 local festival organisations
- 283 individuals that are members of the Scottish Borders People's Panel.
- 39 community planning and other partners and equalities groups.
- Additional individuals that are on the AP distribution lists
- All Community Fund applicants.

Hard copies of survey materials located in local libraries and Council Contact Centres.

## 4. The Policy Context

The Area Partnerships exist in parallel with other developments in policy and practice which shape their mission and purpose. This builds on a long-term commitment to local participation through the Council's support for community councils and the development of the previous Area Forums for the five areas now covered by the Area Partnerships. The Councils Fit for 2024 Transformation strategy also foregrounds empowerment as a key theme and states that:

*".. there is a strong appetite for strengthened community empowerment, engagement, and participation in the Scottish Borders. .... there must be a greater focus on supporting communities to participate in the shaping and enhancing of community resilience and quality of life".*

### 4.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

The Council and its CPP partners are committed to respond to the opportunities and duties in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, particularly but not exclusively those related to Community Planning and tackling inequalities via locality planning. [The Guidance for the Act](#) sets out duties, mechanisms and support needs for community participation in detail and summarises expectations as follows.

*"The CPP and community planning partners work with community bodies to ensure that all bodies which can contribute to community planning are able to do so in an effective way and to the extent that they wish to do so. "*

The Act places equal emphasis in using empowerment to tackle inequality:

*"The CPP develops locality and thematic approaches as appropriate to address these, with participation from community bodies representing the interests of persons experiencing inequalities."*

### 4.2 Wider Engagement Expectations

The wider policy environment foregrounds community engagement in many areas of public policy and services. This includes Children and Young People's Services, Health and Social Care, Community Justice Services and physical and land use planning. The expectation on all linked legislation and policy is for clear connections to be made to the community planning process to deliver community influence and involvement in these areas of public service. These services have distinct aims and duties, which are also relevant to this review, but they are also related to the Community Empowerment Act, especially the development and monitoring of local plans at CPP and Locality Levels which are seen as a key means for local people to influence their direction. More recently the [Place Principle](#) has been promoted by the Scottish Government as a way to focus many of these policy aims in a flexible



localised approach to community needs and service responses. It describes “Place” as follows.

*“Place is where people, location and resources combine to create a sense of identity and purpose, and is at the heart of addressing the needs and realising the full potential of communities. Places are shaped by the way resources, services and assets are directed and used by the people who live in and invest in them.”*

#### **4.3 Area Partnership Proposals & the Scheme of Administration**

The new Area Partnerships have now been operational since February 2018 and replace previous Area Forums, clearly seeking to provide a local framework for meeting many of the policy aspirations above. The paper proposing their establishment describes their role as follows.

*“With the greater emphasis on community empowerment, participative budgeting, and locality planning – not just for the Council, but for other public authorities/services - their main aim will be to form a community engagement platform to develop priorities and outcomes for the area. They will act as a community consultation body, not just for the Council, but other service providers in the area, becoming a strong voice for their own area”.*

This ambition has framed the development of the Area Partnerships which derive their legal identity as a council committee in line with the Council’s Scheme of Administration, an arrangement which we understand was in place for the previous structures.

#### **4.5 Scottish Borders Best Value Assurance Report**

While this recent report recognised many strong and improving areas of the Council’s activity, it does identify challenges in achieving its empowerment aims:

*“Implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has been slow in some respects. The Council and the Scottish Borders community planning partnership need to finalise and implement its locality plans. It also needs to implement a performance management framework that can measure progress against the community plan and locality plans.”*

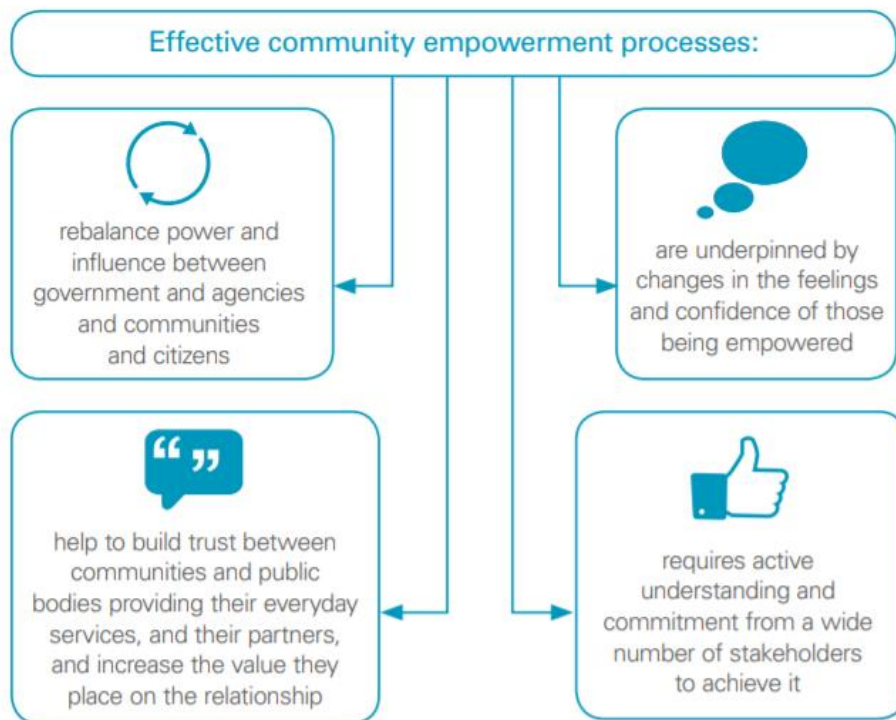
This observation illustrates that achieving empowerment is a challenging process and, from our experience, this has been in the case in areas across Scotland. Many approaches are being tested in different parts of the country and instituting a review of the progress and future direction offers Scottish Borders the chance to contribute to this debate and also look more widely at how it can learn from these as it thinks about how to proceed in the future. This study is already providing useful data about the issues which will have a valuable role locally and has the potential to add to the discussions across the country as a whole.

## 4.6 Principles for Community Empowerment

Audit Scotland convened a multi-agency Strategic Scrutiny Group drawn from a range of national organisations. They produced a report with principles and recommendations for improving the outcomes of empowerment in community planning and public services. These principles describe the features of good community empowerment and frame how scrutiny bodies will hold agencies and community planning partners accountable for implementation of empowerment agenda in the future, backed up by legislation and policy described above. Future planning on empowering communities in Scottish Borders would find these helpful in thinking about the challenges and preparing for how scrutiny and accountability of community empowerment is likely to develop. The document's purpose is described as follows;

*“Although this document was primarily developed for scrutiny bodies it will also benefit public bodies and their partners to be aware of the expectations of scrutiny bodies as encapsulated in a shared framework of what good community empowerment looks like.*

Fig 1 - Effective Empowerment – from Audit Commission Principles



Taken as whole, these policies and legal duties set a delivery context for community empowerment and engagement locally. Their significance becomes clear as we look at the findings of the report and what participants feel must be done to deliver what are clearly the overlapping aspirations of Communities themselves, the Council, its CPP partners and the Scottish Government.

## 4.7 Methods

The research used a multiple-methods approach to engage local people and other stakeholders in dialogue. It had four strands:

- Desk Research – The team looked at the key local and wider policy framework relevant to the work, including the Scheme of Administration, published records of partnership meetings, Community Fund guidelines, the Community Learning and Development plan and other CPP partner statements on engagement.
- An online survey targeted community and third sector partners with 121 respondents (including 3 paper copy responses) commenting on a range of structured and open-ended questions about experiences of, and improvement suggestions for, the Partnerships and local funding arrangements.

The charts below (Fig 2 & 3) provide an overview of where participants in the research came from. And what roles they were playing locally.

Fig 2 - Survey Participation by Area Partnership

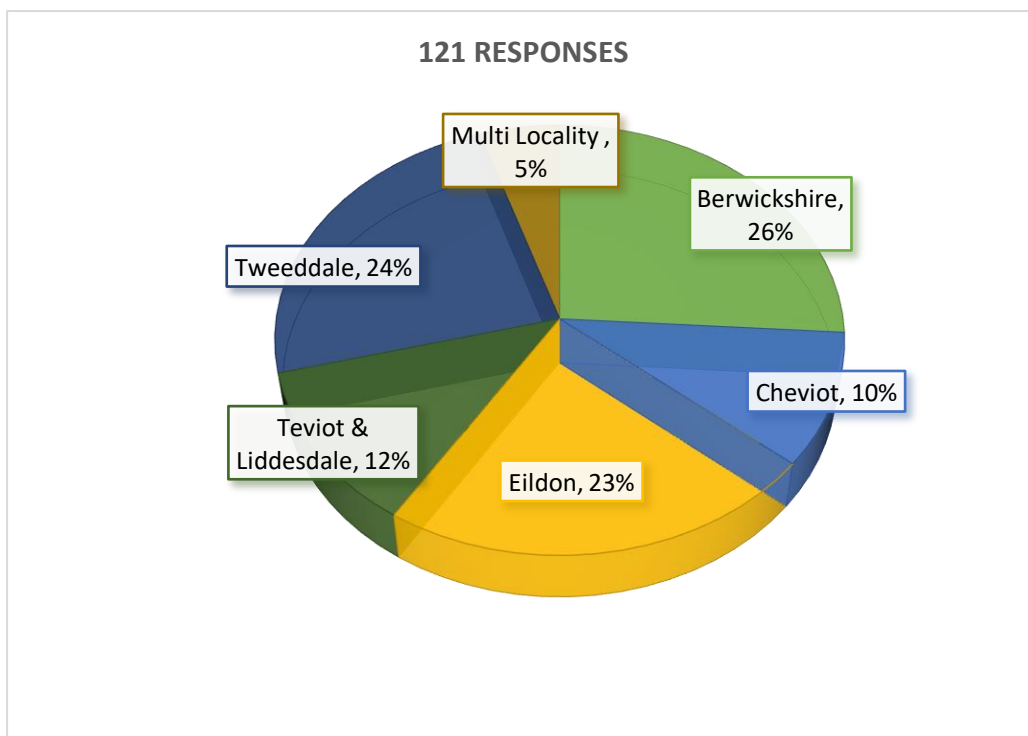
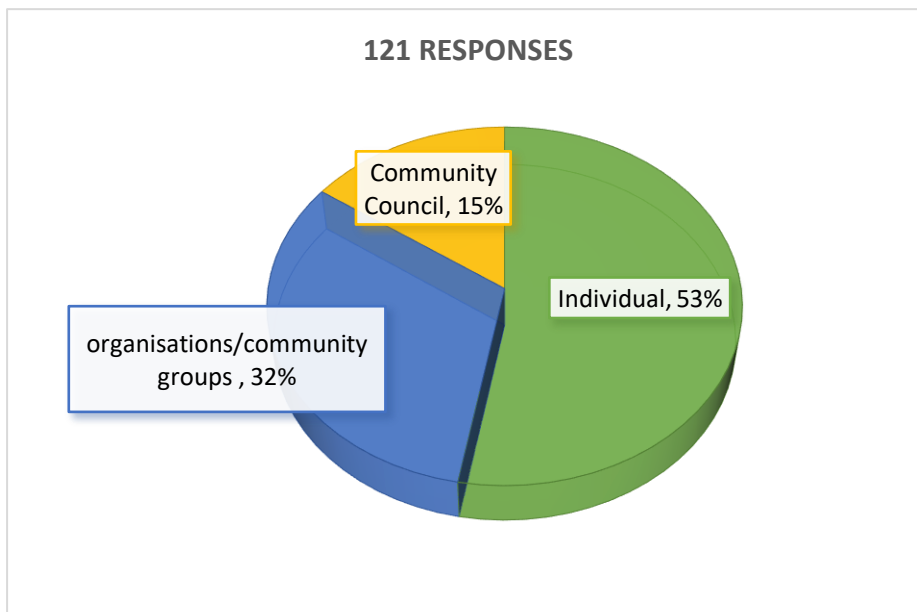


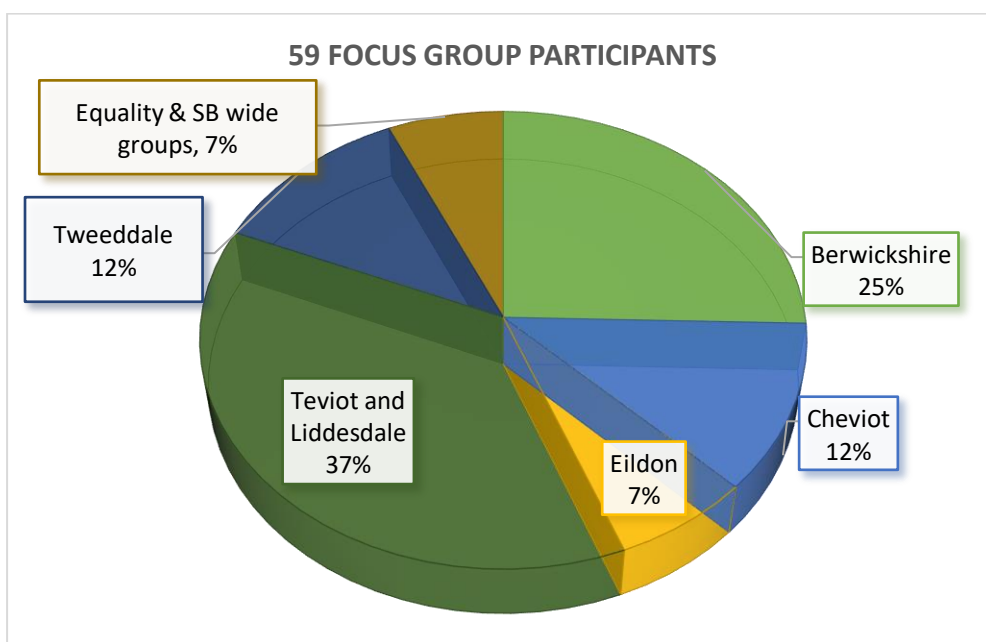
Fig 3 - Overall Survey Participation by Role



- Six qualitative focus groups were conducted, one in each of the partnership areas and an additional focus group targeting those with an interest in equalities issues or from cross Borders groups.

These explored participants' experience of the Partnerships and funding arrangements and sought views on how these could be strengthened. 72 community representatives signed up to attend, with 59 participating overall. The focus group topic guide is included as Appendix 1.

Fig 4 - Focus Group Participants by Partnership Area



The table below sets out the actual attendance at each focus group. Whilst there were a small numbers of individuals respondents the majority were there as members of local community organisations or participation processes such as patients' forums.

<b>Partnership Area Focus Group</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Berwickshire	15
Cheviot	7
Teviot & Liddesdale	22
Tweeddale	7
Eildon	4
Equalities and Scottish Borders wide	4

- Nine individuals took part in detailed stakeholder interviews. These were senior staff or community representatives from:
  - Community Planning Partners such as the NHS and Police Scotland,
  - Capacity building services delivered by multiple organisations.
  - Scottish Borders Council senior staff
  - Scottish Borders Community Councils' Network
  - Registered Social Landlords

See appendix 2 for the topic guide for Key Stakeholders.

There was also an additional seminar for Elected Members to explore the issues with 10 members in attendance. Members participating were predominantly from the opposition group. Their responses are identified in the relevant sections of the report on the Area Partnership and Community Fund. Overall the concerns appeared to overlap with those of local people. One Elected Member who was unable to attend also submitted written comments based on the topic guide. The topic guide for the session can be viewed as appendix 3.

Our recommendations are drawn from a synthesis of the primary research data from all sources augmented by SCDC's experience across Scotland.

## 5. The Findings in Detail

The findings of the research are presented in three broad categories

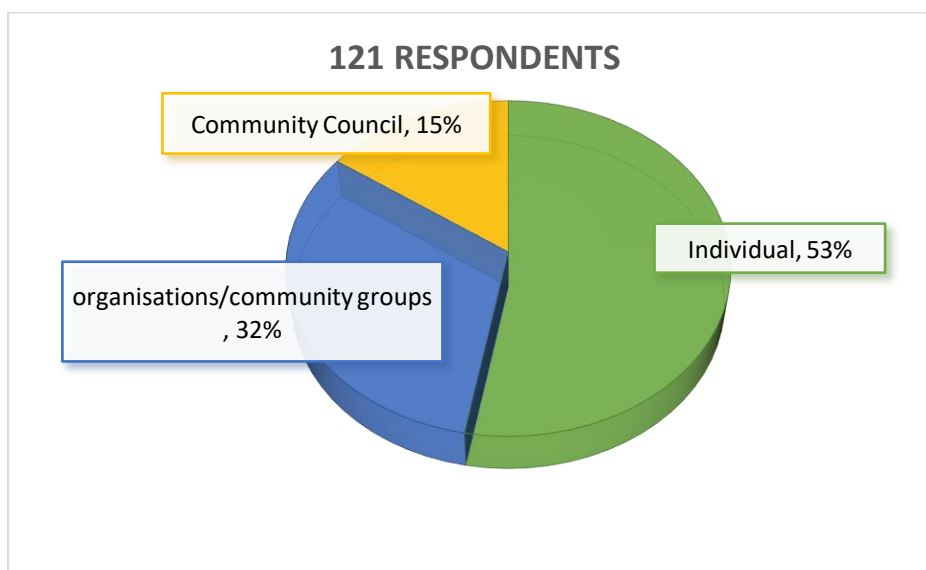
- **The Area Partnerships**
- **The Community Fund**
- **Overarching themes which affect community empowerment**

### 5.1 Who provided their views?

The online survey had 118 responses, there were also 3 paper responses which makes a total of **121 respondents**. The respondents are made up of 3 distinct groupings:

- People identifying themselves as individuals 64 (53%);
- People commenting on behalf of their organisations/community groups 39 (32%)
- People commenting on behalf of their community council 18 (15%).

Fig 5



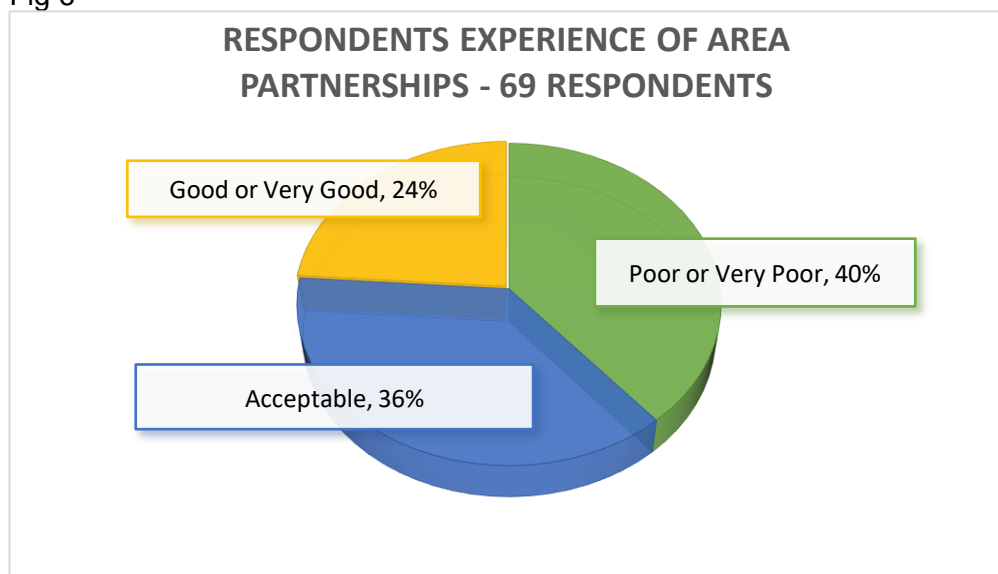
**5.2** Respondents identified the Area Partnership which they fall within. Eildon, Berwickshire and Tweeddale had most respondents. The breakdown of respondents by area is as follows:

Option	Total	Percent of All
Berwickshire	31	26%
Cheviot	12	10%
Eildon	28	23%
Teviot & Liddesdale	15	12%
Tweeddale	29	24%
Multi Locality	6	5%

### 5.3 Analysis of overall experience by Area Partnership

69 (57%) respondents said that they or someone from their organisation/community council have attended an Area Partnership meeting. Of those who have attended the AP meeting; 28 (40%) reported a 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' experience. 25 (36%) said the experience was 'Acceptable' and 16 (24%) reported that their overall experience was 'Good' or 'Very good'.

Fig 6



Of the 69 respondents who have attended an AP meeting there was very little difference in their experience across the 5 APs. It should be noted that the responses from those attending each AP is low.

The responses by Area Partnership are detailed below:

#### Berwickshire

There were 31 respondents from the Berwickshire area. Of that 31, 15 (48%) people said that they attended the Berwickshire Area Partnership meetings. Of those who have attended the meetings 2 (13%) reported that their overall experience was 'Acceptable' with twice that 4 (27%) reporting a 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' experience. 9 (60%) people did not

answer the question and the reasons for this are not clear. Some respondents found the AP meetings were well organised and useful for information dissemination, however, most people reported issues with the format and decision making, poor feedback and disappointment that the community could not influence the agenda.

### **Comments from Berwickshire online respondents and focus group participants:**

- “I have found the meetings informative and inclusive with everyone given a chance to discuss specified topics.” **(Berwickshire online survey response)**
- “Little usable feedback – or sense of progress.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**
- “The last one I attended was a classic case of "railroading" an agenda, by the Chairman, to (a) achieve the time limit deadline and (b) minimise active contributions from the attendees. When an application for a Berwickshire Community Fund grant was considered, the Chairman provided no opportunity for questions and/or explanations and did not even ask for a show of hands in approving or rejecting the application, thereby reducing the supposedly democratic process to a rubber stamp exercise, following the Initial Assessment by SBC officers.” **(Berwickshire online survey response)**
- “Lack of clarity about purpose of the groups, their structures & processes for influence.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**
- “Communication with potential participants – weak.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**

### **Cheviot**

There were 12 respondents from the Cheviot area. Of the 12, 6 (50%) people said that they attended the Cheviot AP meeting. Of those who have attended the AP meeting; 4 (67%) reported a ‘Poor’ experience. 2 (33%) said that their experience was ‘Acceptable’ or ‘Good’. People report that there are helpful presentations at the events, lack of information about when the meetings are happening, a lack of consistency in attendance and little time to debate the issues arising.

### **Comments from Cheviot online respondents and focus group members:**

- “We feel that under the new format we receive less information than the previous Area Forums. We are continuously asked opinions and it is collected but nothing is done with it and we don't see any actions.” **(Cheviot online survey response)**



- “People who turn up are often different from meeting to meeting. The staff have changed recently. We are required to work in tables with post its which stifles discussion.” **(Cheviot Focus Group)**
- “There have been helpful presentations by officers and useful discussions in groups. However, the Cheviot meetings are poorly attended. Many CCs and other community organisations do not send representatives. As a result, it would be difficult to say the partnerships reflect the views of the wider community.” **(Cheviot online survey response)**
- “The presentation on the Tablets (iPad for pupils) took a lot of time and the discussion about the playpark was slotted in. It wasn’t handled well and there wasn’t enough time to answer all the questions on an important community issue – very rushed.” **(Cheviot Focus Group)**
- “There has been some confusion as to what the events have been trying to achieve although some improvement of late. There have been so few people attending. Important subjects but little focused time to debate and make a difference.” **(Cheviot online survey response)**
- “We don’t know what actions are taken as a result of our discussion in groups. We were told that our discussions would feed into local area plans around 4 themes. We still don’t have a plan.” **(Cheviot Focus Group)**
- “Agencies (like the Police) have come along to the meetings and asked for input to their plan, this is positive although I don’t think anyone contributed. We moved on to the next item.” **(Cheviot Focus Group)**

## **Eildon**

There were 28 respondents from the Eildon area. Of the 28, 17 (59%) people said that they attended the Eildon Area Partnership meeting. Of those who have attended the AP meeting; 10 (59%) reported an ‘Acceptable’ experience. 5 (29%) expressed a ‘Good’ experience. People reported that the AP is a good place to meet councillors, they are well organised, but the overall feeling is that that the meetings are not hugely relevant and there was limited opportunity for the community to have a say on important decisions.

## **Comments from Eildon online respondents and focus group members:**

- “The meeting I attended did not feel hugely relevant for my area of work and felt like a duplication to work I was already tasked with carrying out. I also have found it challenging to give time to attending. I didn’t find the meeting hugely helpful and it seemed more like a talking space for service and Councillors.” **(Eildon online survey response)**

- “The meeting and interaction during the meeting was good. However, the outcomes from the group were summarised into what outcomes the council facilitators wanted rather than from the group attending.” **(Eildon online survey response)**
- “Well chaired, adequately organised but a confusing mix of subjects covered with little prior warning or preparation possible.” **(Eildon online survey response)**
- “Partnership are not about coming to agreements on things in my experience, its often about being lectured to.” **(Eildon Focus Group)**
- “I think partnership is a misnomer as things stand at the present moment it’s not really a partnership as one party has the others arm up their back.” **(Eildon Focus Group)**
- “The partnerships are often about telling us things that the Council have done and not really even asking if we agree. We’ve got the script and the PowerPoint and this is how amazing it all is –its post rationalisation.” We don’t have any votes – were the audience - we are allowed to chunter on about but then there is no more time” **(Eildon online survey response)**

### **Teviot & Liddesdale**

There were 15 respondents from the Teviot & Liddesdale area. Of the 15, 11 (73%) people said that they attended the Teviot & Liddesdale Area Partnership meeting. Of those who have attended the AP meeting; 11 (91%) reported a ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’ experience as illustrated below.

### **Comments from Teviot & Liddesdale online/paper copy respondents and Focus Group members:**

- “Not coordinated and initial discussions seemed rather broad. Didn’t encourage involvement and unsurprisingly attendance has drifted away. Local groups need to have active participation in the decision making to make this work.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale online survey responses)**
- “Agenda pre-set, no time for interaction with other community to share CURRENT challenges. Cheap group discussions which are somewhat irrelevant; what applies in a town does not apply in a rural community.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale online survey responses)**
- “The focus of the groups I attended was driven by council officers rather than community representatives. The range of issues covered was at times too focussed on a single issue; e.g. Housing when the subject was Place and too general when the subject was community priorities.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale online survey responses)**
- “There were far too many items on the agenda and very little about rural communities. The agenda contained policy items that few

people knew anything about and so could not feedback on.“

**(Teviot & Liddesdale Focus Group)**

- “We were given no chance to speak until the end of the meeting (matters arising), we used to have monthly meetings and this changed to bi-monthly.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale Focus Group)**
- “There is a difference in the demographics and numbers of CCs means that one size does not fit all. Moving the meeting around means that we have to travel quite far.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale Focus Group)**
- “We do not have the resources to attend. We are not eligible for expenses.” **(Teviot & Liddesdale paper survey response)**

### **Tweeddale**

There were 29 respondents from the Tweeddale area. Of the 29, 16 (55%) people said that they attended the Tweeddale Area Partnership meeting. Of those who have attended the meeting; 6 (38%) reported a ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’ experience, 5 (31%) reported an ‘Acceptable’ experience and 5 (31%) reported a ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’ experience. Tweeddale Area Partnership is slightly better thought of than the other APs, people said that it is well organised and there are opportunities to ask question about the theme. However, it also has the same issues as other APs which limit the effectiveness of the model – poor attendance at meetings by the community, restricted agenda setting, limited time for discussion about important issues and lack of continuity from meeting to meeting.

### **Comments from Tweeddale online respondents and Focus Group members:**

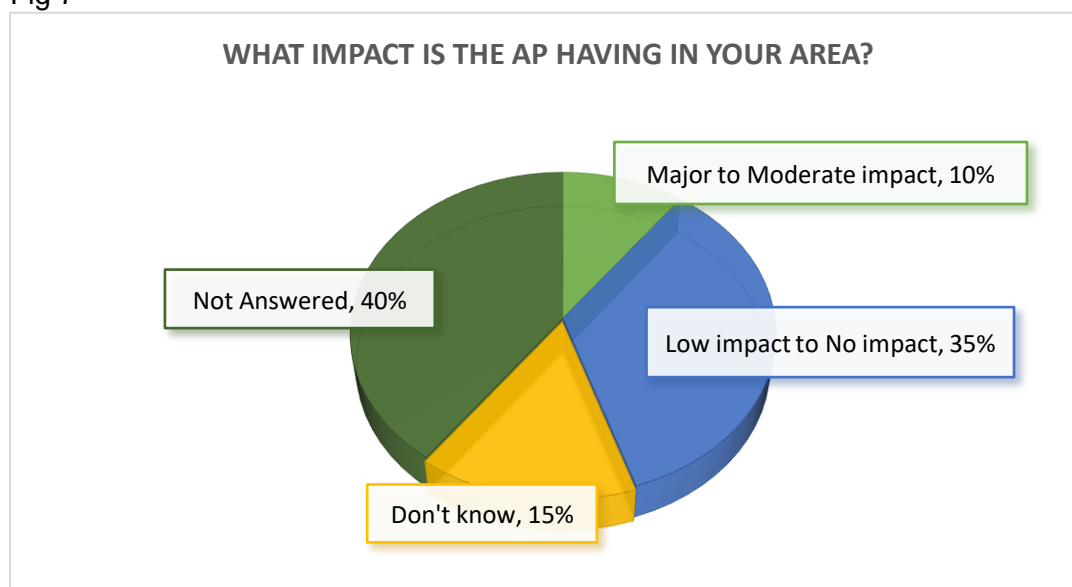
- “They have been well organised, and every effort is made to keep to time which is always appreciated.” **(Tweeddale online survey response)**
- “There is no focus or direct action to engage the people to have a direct input into the theme. Transport was discussed recently and there was no one there from the community who could have a direct input e.g. a community transport organisation or volunteer drivers.” **(Tweeddale Focus Group)**
- “It is a good idea that important subjects are raised with communities and that those communities are given the opportunity to question and to comment. The present format can be improved to make the consultation processes more meaningful. Subject information needs to go out early, be raised at then next meeting, thought about and concluded at a subsequent meeting. Some subjects are very complex and cannot be concluded in a 20-minute session.” **(Tweeddale online survey response)**

- “The APs tend to sandwich in big issues like the iPads presentation and the play parks which leaves little time for discussion and debate.” **(Tweeddale Focus Group)**
- “There isn't a fair representation of the community attending the APs and while holding them in different venues means more can potentially attend, it actually results in different people attending each time, so there's no consistency and therefore no understanding of the format. The format has been different at each meeting I've attended.” **(Tweeddale online survey response)**

#### 5.4. Overview of Views on Impact

The survey of 121 people across all partnerships showed that – 44 (36%) people said that the impact was ‘Low’ to No impact’, - 18 (15%) did not know and 12 (10%) reported a ‘Moderate to Major impact’. 47 (40%) of respondents did not answer the question (see Fig 7). Those who feel that APs are having an impact also acknowledge that the APs are in their infancy and are still developing and that as a result it’s hard to determine the impact at this early stage. Others who describe the impact as low to moderate say that the APs are simply ‘talking shops’ and that it is a ‘top down decision-making structure which has little space for the community.’ There is a concern that the APs aren’t making clear links with other programmes/agendas and that the meetings have been used to impose cuts on the community. Whilst there is an obvious concern that only 10% expressed a positive view with a much bigger negative opinion expressed, the numbers who didn’t know or didn’t answer may raise other issues about whether people feel able to judge the effectiveness of the Partnerships. This relates to the point made by Elected Members, senior officers and local people that we need to do more on what “good looks like” in the context of community empowerment and also raise levels of understanding about it.

Fig 7



## Comments

- “The comments that have been discussed over the time have now made their way into the priorities for the development plans with young people quite centre stage in many. I think it will take time to see the overall impact of them once the development plans are actioned.” **(Online survey response)**
- “I feel that the Area Partnership and its role is still evolving so expect to see greater impact as the Partnership evolves.” **(Online survey response)**
- “To date I see little coming out of the area partnership other than the general information exchange that happened in past CC Forum meetings. As said above I am not clear that, at this point, any actions of real relevance to our community have resulted from the Area Partnership.” **(Online survey response)**
- “...there was previously a drive for local area plans for each area and then these were linked up to the areas partnerships. I understand the local plans are back on the agenda but it’s unclear how this relates to the AP locality plans or other from the Health & Social Care partnership. We did have one meeting of the AP looking at health and Social Care but the links aren’t clear.” **(Equalities and cross community working Focus Group)**
- “At many of the meetings we’ve had proposals about cuts to toilets, playparks etc and discussions about the community taking them on. In many instances the AP meetings have been used to involve the community in making cuts to service provision.” **(Teviot and Liddesdale Focus Group )**
- “It is not viewed as having any particular impact or relevance to individuals and there is no perceived connection between Council decisions and the AP.” **(Online survey response)**

### 5.5 The representativeness of the Area Partnerships

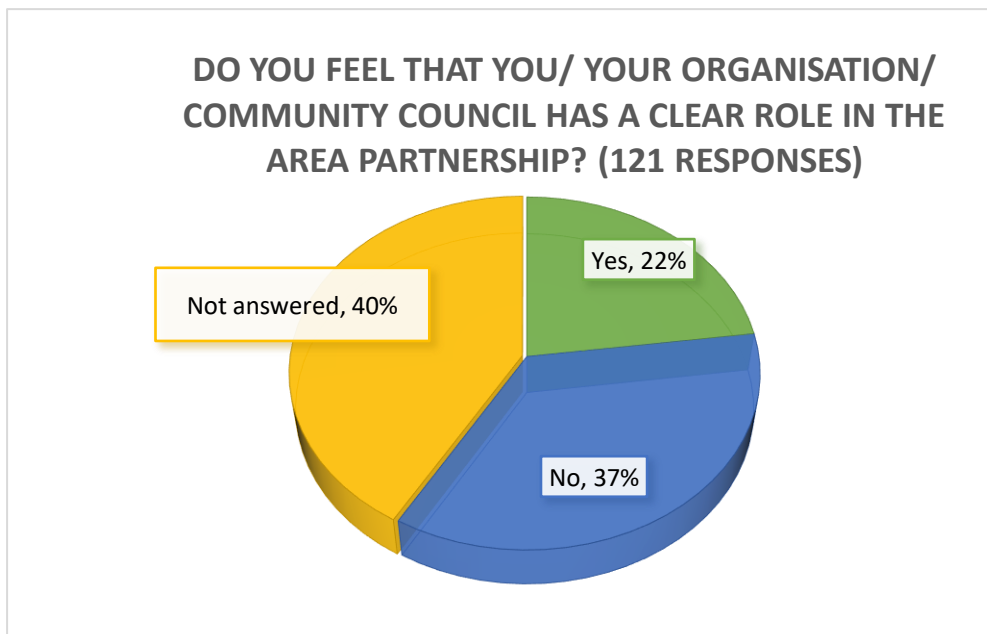
Survey respondents and stakeholders who attended the AP meetings reported that they were a good way to meet agency representatives and SBC officials and Elected Members. However, the research indicates that APs are not representative of the community, they do not have a diverse cross section of the community and are dominated by the concerns of larger villages. A selection of comments illustrate these sentiments below:

- “I have only attended one meeting, which was very informative, and a great place to voice concern to all of the councillors present, not just our local (community based) councillors who attend our village meetings. I did however feel that a lot of the focus of the meeting was on the larger communities within the locality, and some of the smaller villages are forgotten.” **(Online survey response)**
- “I have attended all of the APs in different areas under the ‘quality of life theme’. I find them useful because they are linked into the local plan and I can meet other agency reps as well as community members to discuss specific issues regarding quality of life.” **(Community Planning Partner – Stakeholder)**

- “Rather a large and disparate gathering. A few rather vocal individuals tend to dominate the floor with well-rehearsed views which tends to be intimidating for the occasional contributor. Not sure how valid/representative the views made known are, given the self-selecting nature of the audience. The two I've managed to attend” **(Online survey response)**
- “In my role I have attended all 5 of them on a number of occasions. I would say they are a good start but more needs to be done to get a good cross section of the actual community to attend and participate. Some are better than others at this and I think they are an improvement on the more formal community meetings. Everything takes time to develop and they are in their development stage.” **(Online survey response)**
- “Agency partners would appear at APs only when their theme came up which is not useful.” **(Teviot and Liddesdale Focus Group)**
- “If you get diff types of people in a room you get diff solutions- you don't get the same old thinking and same old answers, leading to a different outcomes from conversations ..... One of the benefits should be that multiple levels of impact of change, cuts or service restructuring. are better understood. We haven't achieved this in the Area Partnerships.” **(Equalities and cross community working Focus Group)**

### 5.6 ‘Do you feel that you/your organisation/community council has a clear role in the Area Partnership?’

Fig 8



45 (37%) of the 121 people who responded to the survey said that they or their organisation/community council did not have a clear role in the Area Partnership. 27 (22%) said they had a role. A large number 49 (40%) of people did not respond to this question again prompting questions about whether the process is sufficiently backed up by clear aims and understanding of rights and duties. Some respondents were positive about the APs and advised that they thought the model is in its infancy and that the structure of meetings is changing over time. Overall, most people were less positive and felt that they had a diminished role where the views of community councils and other community groups are being ignored.

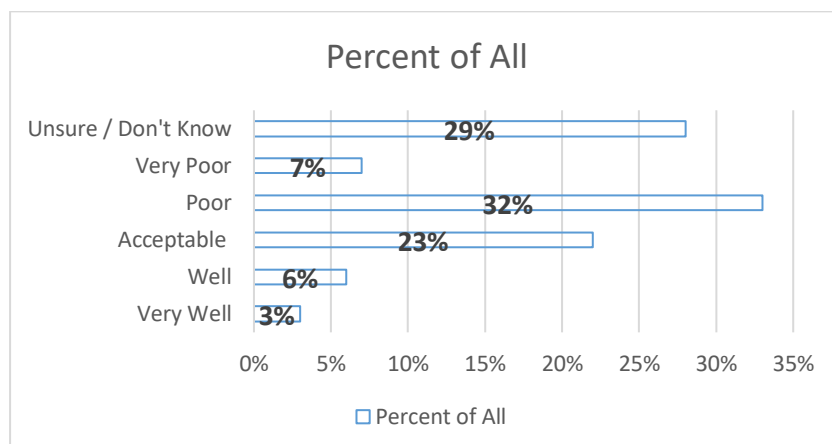
Many felt that they are being used as a 'tick box' exercise to 'rubber stamp' SBC decisions. Many respondents who answered said that there is no partnership working or co-production happening at the AP meetings. People would like more co-ordination between the Community Learning Partnerships and to include the voice of young people in the future. Some respondents would like to see a clearer purpose for Area Partnerships and be involved in establishing this and real decision-making power being devolved to the community rather than budget decisions being restricted to local authority councillors.

### 5.7 The Area Partnership meetings and how they contribute to achieving change

69 (57%) of respondents who have attended AP meetings were asked to comment on the how the AP is doing under the headings identified below using a combined matrix question looking at different aspects of the meetings. In most criteria people who attended the meetings suggested that the APs performance is either 'Poor' or 'Very poor' against a range of criteria. The areas where the APs are performing well are in selecting the issues it is dealing with and information sharing. The challenges are the limited role for the community, having the right people attend who represent the community and the lack of transparency in decision making. The detailed elements of responses to the question regarding how the APs are doing against certain criteria are detailed below:

#### a. Achieving Partnership aims.

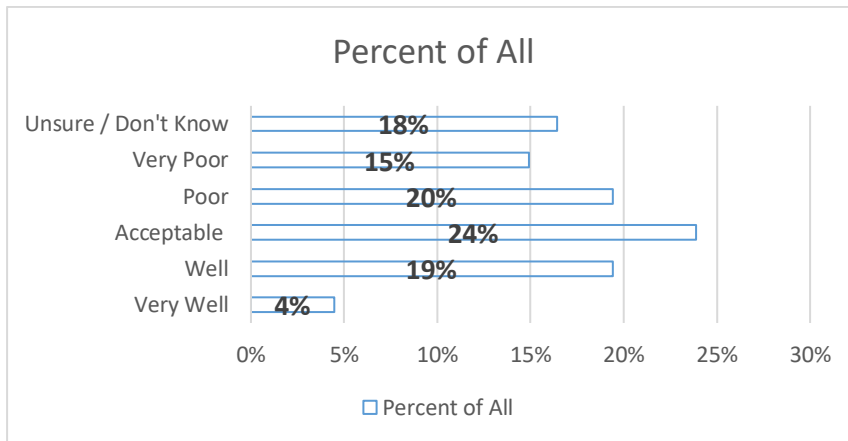
Fig 9



27 (39%) people said that the AP's attempts to achieve its partnership aims are 'Poor' or 'Very Poor'. With 22 (32%) expressing this in the range from 'Acceptable' to 'Very Well'. The 20 (29%) who were 'Unsure/Don't know' may suggest a lack of clarity on either the purpose of the partnerships or whether they are meeting their aims.

**b. Selecting the issues it is dealing with.**

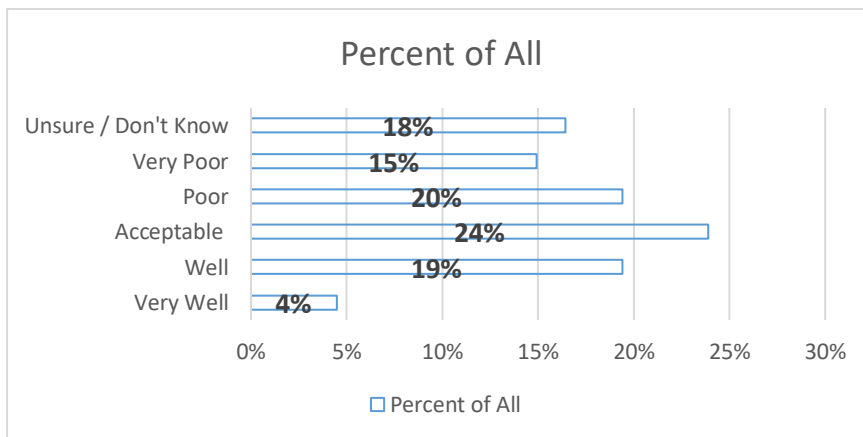
Fig 10



Although 16 (24%) described selection of issues as 'Acceptable', 24 (35%) described it as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor', while 16 (23%) said that APs are doing 'Well' or 'Very Well' in selecting issues for discussion at the meetings.

**c. How the meeting agendas are determined.**

Fig 11

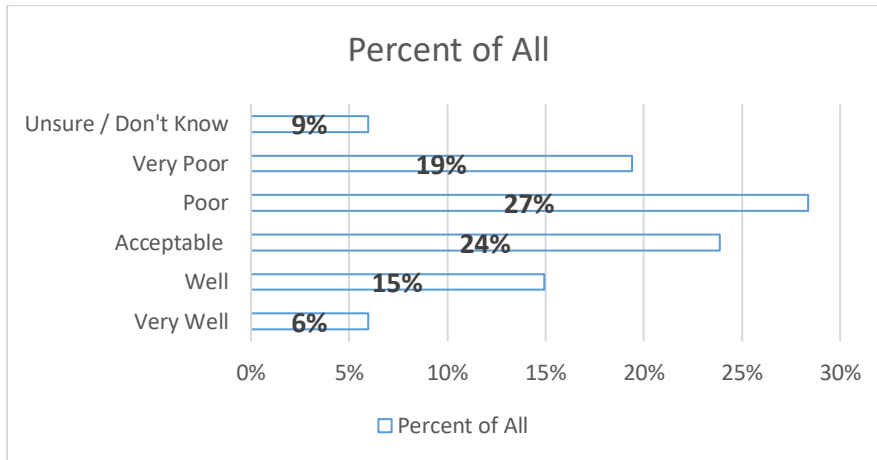


24 (35%) said that their AP's are 'Poor' or 'Very poor' in how the meeting agendas are determined, and 16 (23%) thinking this was being done 'Well' or 'Very well'.



**d. How local people or community reps can express their views.**

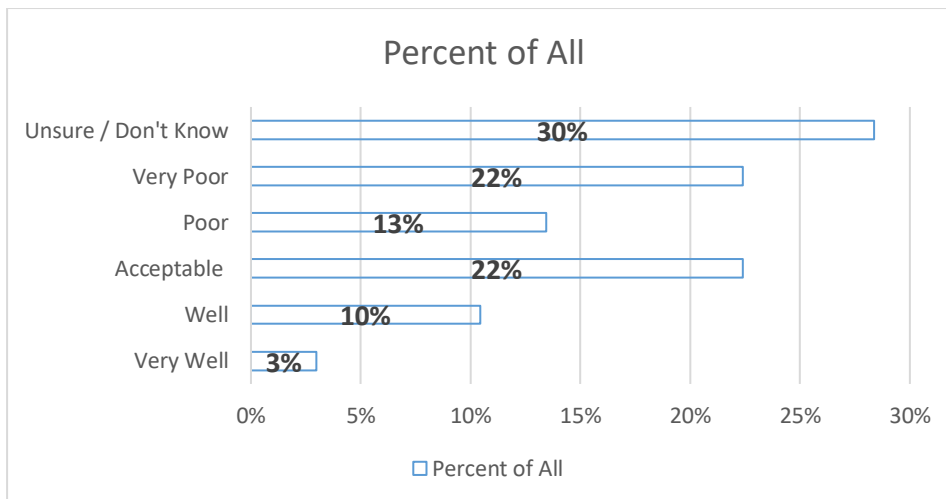
Fig 12



32 (46%) said their APs were 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' in allowing people or community reps to express their views, with 14 (21%) saying that it was 'Well' or 'Very Well'. There is far less ambiguity about this question with very few 'Unsure/Don't know'. This further illustrates the strength of feeling around this issue.

**e. The way decisions are made e.g. voting arrangements.**

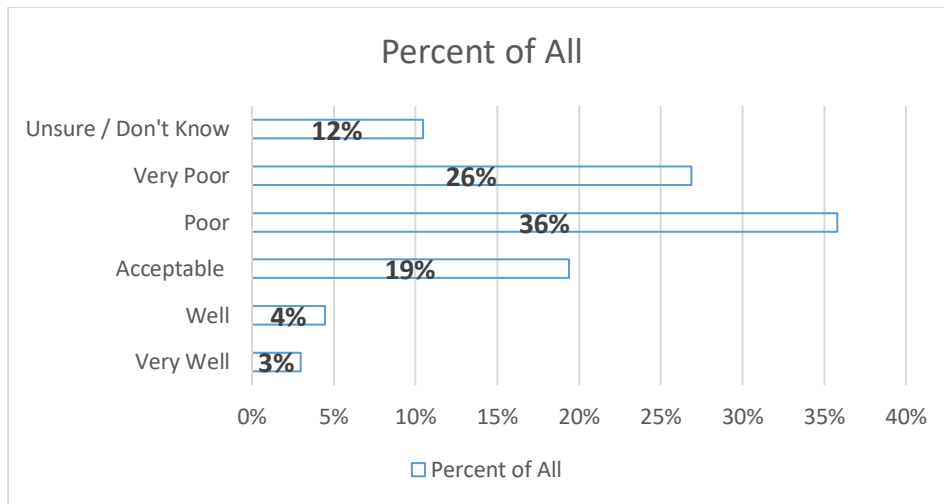
Fig 13



24 (35%) said their AP's are 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' in the way decisions are made. Many people 21 (30%) 'were 'Unsure/Don't know' about the way decisions are made for APs which suggests that more information is needed for those participants involved in the process.

**f. The right people attending and participating to ensure the Area Partnerships achieve their aims.**

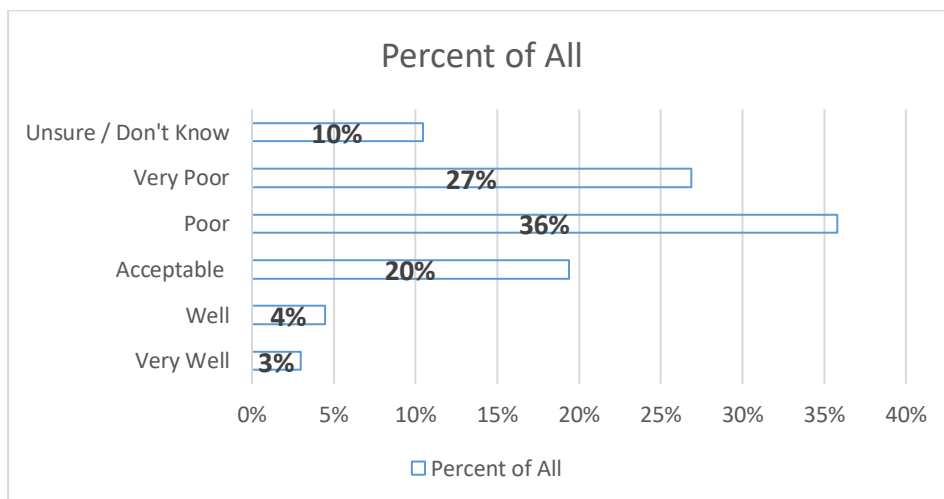
Fig 14



43 (62%) said their APs were 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' in ensuring that the right people attend to achieve their aims. 5 (7%) felt that they did this 'Well or 'Very Well'.

**g. Ensuring that communities can influence the agenda.**

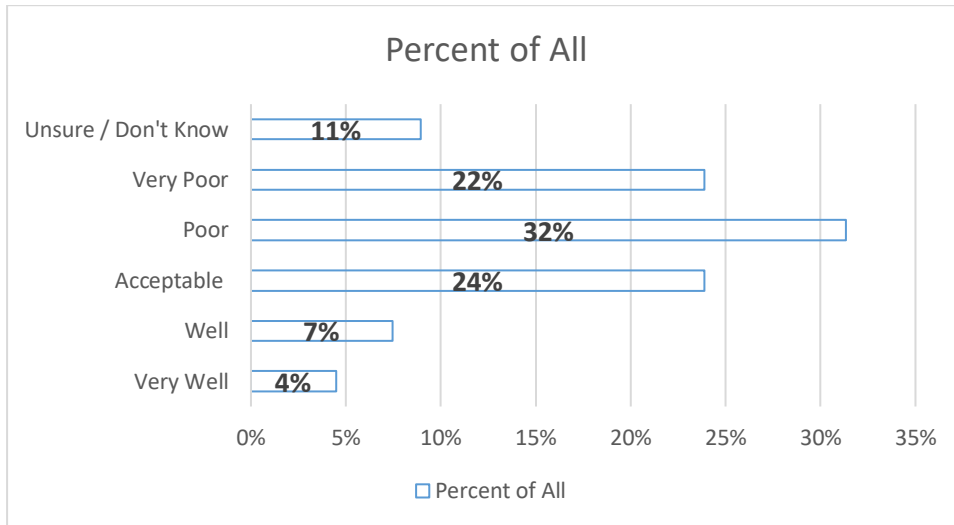
Fig 15



42 (61%) said their APs were 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' in ensuring that communities can influence the agenda. 5 (7%) felt that they did this 'Well or 'Very Well'.

## h. How it helps you influence decisions.

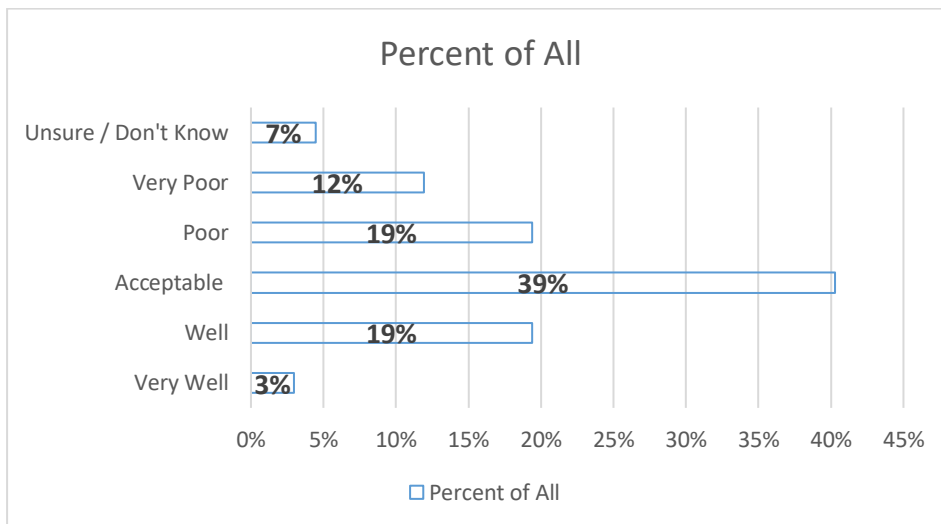
Fig 16



37 (54%) said their APs were 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' in helping individuals influence decisions. 8 (11%) felt that they did this 'Well' or 'Very Well'.

## i. How well it provides access to information.

Fig 17



27 (39%) said their APs are 'Acceptable' in providing access to information. With a further 15 (22%) saying this was achieved 'Well' or 'Very Well'. This verifies the findings from the focus groups and interviews, however some comments were more mixed.

## Comments:

- “Whilst much of the meeting is devoted to public consultation, some items require a decision by Councillors only, and it is not always clear whether comments from the public are wanted.” **(Online survey response)**
- “There was no ‘partnership’ on display, merely what the more cynical might conclude was an event that would tick a box for the council labelled ‘community consultation/partnership’.” **(Online survey response)**
- “The intention is there to support empowerment, but I don’t think APs do that. At the moment paid statutory staff outnumber the community, comments from the community voices are not minuted. This send signals around equity, power and interests.” **(Stakeholder - Community Planning Partner)**
- “Not co-ordinated and initial discussions seemed rather broad. Didn’t encourage involvement and unsurprisingly attendance has drifted away. Local groups need to have active participation in the decision making to make this work.” **(Online survey response)**

## 5.8 General observations Equality of access to the meetings

Another key issue raised by a number of participants were related to the accessibility of the AP process in terms of a lack of resources to address barriers people face in attending the sessions. This includes the need to explore how out of pocket expenses such as transport costs can be met for those on low incomes.

“5000 local people don’t have access to a car. Transport is therefore a Civil Rights issue.” **Stakeholder - Equalities focus group**

Or to promote the availability of other supports such as BSL interpreting, advocacy support for those with mental health issues or provision of materials in accessible formats.

“...if you are marginalised by a disability you might not be up on the jargon like you would if you worked in the vol sector.” **Stakeholder - Equalities focus group**

“If you are an ordinary member of the public, have a mental health problem or learning disability it can all be too much.” **Stakeholder - Equalities focus group**

## 5.9 Involving local people in design

There was a strong view that local people, including experienced community activists, had not been included appropriately in the design of the new partnership structures or the funding proposals. Despite frustration that they were being consulted now after the fact, it was felt that doing this would produce a better result in terms of partnership processes and ultimately other outcomes. Participants felt they could be meaningfully involved in design of workable processes for influence.

“If you get different types of people in a room you get different solutions - you don't get the same old thinking and same old answers, leading to a different outcomes from conversations..... One of the benefits of really local participation should be that multiple levels of impact of change, cuts or service restructuring. are better understood.” **Focus group participant**

There was also a view that learning from other structures like Community Learning and Development Partnerships or Parent Teachers Association processes could improve things.

“Some of the Area Partnership meetings should focus on how we help people participate. The PTA mechanism is a better way of engaging people – not perfect but better than the Area Partnership for helping people be involved in shaping policies at an earlier stage” **Focus group Participant**

For many people, genuine influence in the system had been designed out to some extent with the lack of a community perspective undermining partnership processes on a very fundamental level.

“Partnerships are not about coming to agreements on things in my experience, its often about being lectured to. I think partnership is a misnomer as things stand at the present moment its not really a partnership as one party has the others arm up their back” **Focus group Participant**

There were many observations regarding the way that agendas were set in the meetings, as well as the fact that local people's views were seldom recorded in the minutes.

When these were combined with more general concerns about the overriding roles and voting rights of Elected Members in decision making at the meetings, and in relation to grant awards, questions arose regarding the status of the Area Partnerships as a formal council committee. This raised issues about the additional powers of Elected Members arising from the Council's Scheme of Administration which governs the operation of the Area Partnerships and whether this was fully reflective of broader partnership and empowerment principles. This is why a recommendation of this review is to consider whether this structure best suits overall aims of the Area Partnerships or whether it might be sending the wrong messages to communities and other CPP partners.

## **5.10 The Wider Environment for Effective Participation**

Good community involvement processes and structures must foster strong feelings of belonging and community. There is a strong view that the Area Partnerships on their own cannot deliver this meaningful empowerment or effective locality planning unless they link more effectively to a broader “ecosystem” of community organisations at the more local level where local experience helps people develop their views, ideas and proposals.

It was felt that the sense of community was strong in the villages and distinct towns, but generally much less so across the Area Partnership boundaries where settlements were too far apart, varied and affected by different localised concerns or relationships to wider services. As a result, people did not always feel they shared common bonds with other localities within the partnership area.

“Local means different things in rural villages and the towns.” **Focus group participant**

There was also a view expressed by many that reductions in support for community activity had a negative impact on this wider landscape of organisations operating at a more accessible scale and that rebuilding this was an important part in building robust foundations for more strategic discussions at the Partnerships.

“We have lost a sense of community along the way and we have lost that to some extent as youth clubs and other local work has reduced. It’s a challenge to re-engage people but an exciting one as the best solutions and ideas often come from communities.” **Focus group participant**

The process needs to be able to develop links between groups actively locally where there are common interests and priorities and also to be able to use these links to help all partners make sense of the wider agenda across Partnership boundaries and ensure that people were able to participate at different levels for different reasons.

There are also pragmatic reasons for investing in this broader ecology.

“Area partnerships could perhaps be a site for brokering the relationships needed to encourage groups to share resources, collaborate rather than compete and avoid seeking to claim the same social markets.” **Stakeholder – SBC senior staff**

The Area Partnerships should therefore seek to consciously improve links to community councils, community development trusts, issue-based groups and those serving specific segments of the population. The premise is that these organisations all play a current, or have a potential role, in bringing the voices of their members and service users to the fore and that the current process is not succeeding in bringing them into locality planning. This is largely, but not exclusively due to what people view as limitations of the scale, infrequency of meetings and lack of connectedness of the Area Partnerships. It should be noted that to improve the responsiveness of the process overall would also require other groups to be self-critical in how well they view their communities as represented and how the voices of harder to reach groups are included.

The Area Partnerships need to be able to effectively link not only with representative groups but also other participation processes, such as Community-led Action Planning, Community Learning Partnerships, or town wide masterplans. They should also make clear connections to major infrastructure initiatives like community school capital development project or Greenspace initiatives. A participant in the equalities

and cross community focus group described the limitations of the current Area Partnership structures in delivering this wider approach.

“They [the partnerships] are too formal in organisation and not engaging enough. Even if we could bring a whole multi-faceted diverse group of people in, I am not sure we would get the right outcomes. It’s too ambitious and needs a layered approach to involving folk. There should be local sub groups structures with more local representatives with more diverse conversations bringing more dimensions in. I am not sure that one meeting can capture all of this.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**

### 5.11 Elected Members’ views on the Area Partnerships

Elected Members also added a distinctive perspective to the discussion on the Area Partnerships. The purpose of this discussion was to gather views rather than develop proposals and the points below are a summary of what was raised:

- Members thought the current Area Partnership process was an improvement from the old Area Forums which were too Elected Member led. However, the consensus was that there was a significant distance to go to develop them.
- Members saw the Partnerships as important in democratic terms if enough representative participation could be secured and sustained and this helped the authority identify and respond to local issues.
- The representation of community concerns was seen as a way to ensure that less money was wasted on low priority action so more resources are available for key priorities. It was viewed as important that dialogue also helps communities understand the current financial challenges for services.
- It was felt that the Locality Plan process allowed the APs to have a clearer focus.
- A number of Members felt that the more facilitative approach was popular and noted that as this has become less frequent, the attendance has reduced significantly.
- However, it was felt that, even with well facilitated dialogue, people find it difficult to see how the AP activity is sufficiently connected to the decision-making processes and where their influence was in these. Having confidence in this was viewed as crucial to maintaining involvement.
- Members thought that the recording of the meetings could be improved to enable better feedback and that it shouldn’t always be the Council who is responsible for follow up action.
- Members noted that the process was not attracting widespread participation which may be partly a feature of how it is promoted. It is recognised that this is also linked to the scale of the areas and frequency of the meetings. There was a view that they won’t be able to assist communities who feel additionally marginalised by their rural locations.
- The difficulties in accessing the meetings and the availability and costs of transport were acknowledged.

- There was a sense that Members wanted to see the Partnerships strengthened in ways that suited a wider range of local people using techniques and approaches which better suited some population groups especially young people. Some Members felt that to achieve this there would need to be a culture change in the Council as whole, in relation to co-producing services with young people, for example.
- In common with many other participants in the research, they recognised that specialist consultative work such as that carried out in schools or with those with health problems needed to be more effectively linked to the thinking at Area Partnerships.
- There was a recognition that support to more localised community councils and other forms of local community organisations was important to help them take issues to, and action from, the Area Partnerships.
- Some Members felt that related structures, such as the CLD partnerships, could help as a part of the process of identifying and addressing issues in a more joined up way. This was also seen as a better way to keep more people involved.
- There was a concern that the process was focused mainly on Council services when it needed to be able to discuss and influence those of other community planning partners such as the NHS.
- Ultimately there was a view that the Partnerships were a positive move but that they needed to be further strengthened if they were to be able to retain the confidence of local people.

## Area Partnership Recommendations

### Partnership structures

- 1 Feedback to each of the 5 Area Partnerships the results of this research, and in partnership with those who attend Area Partnerships - plus SBC officers, CPP partner reps and local community reps, look at short term improvements for each Area Partnership”
- 2 Establish a longer-term working group of community reps, officers and Elected Members to discuss how APs can be more effective using the SCDC research to guide discussions. The working group should look at issues such as:
  - The relationship to the Scheme of Administration.
  - Increasing transparency of decision making.
  - Engaging the community in setting the agenda for the meetings.
  - Extending decision making to community groups/representative.
  - Ensuring that the contribution of community members, officers and Councillors are accurately recorded and publicised.
- 3 Each AP should consider whether fixed locations or rotating the venue increases access to the process. In doing so they should consult with potential participants and not just those who attend regularly.



- 4 Area Partnerships should consider the impact of their boundaries on local participation and have clearer relationships with more local community-based organisations and partnerships in their areas.
- 5 APs should also be encouraged to seek assistance or views from other local engagement processes to take forward issues they are dealing with and pay due regard to local experience.
- 6 Opportunities should be created to help this wider range of local stakeholders feed into locality plans.
- 7 Reforming and strengthened Area Partnerships should be part of a broader discussion about delivering community empowerment in the SBC area as described later in this report.
- 8 They should improve communication with well-established community councils and community groups at more local levels to more effectively link local concerns to the agenda of the Area Partnerships.
- 9 They should also involve other local groups including those working on specific issues, local service developments and those representing people experiencing inequality or discrimination.
- 10 Community empowerment action should not always require issues to be initiated at AP meetings. Mechanisms should be found for ideas and proposals to emerge from local community-led processes and seek support from the AP to achieve change.

### **At the Meetings**

To improve the experience of APs and other consultation activity the CPP should:

- 11 Continue to develop a range of innovative facilitative techniques for use in the APs and broader participation environment.
- 12 Commission training for partners in using good deliberative dialogue techniques. Here are useful [training opportunities](#) and [facilitation tools](#) which could be explored.

### **Avoid exclusion**

The current approach does not reach those in greatest need. The recommendations below can help improve this:

- 13 Look at ways to remove transport and finance barriers to ensure people can attend.
- 14 Consider the support needs of those who want to attend. And how these can be resourced e.g. BSL interpreting, language interpreting, advocacy support.
- 15 Co-produce an enhanced equality impact assessment which explores the extent to which Community Empowerment processes, including the Area Partnerships, deliver on equality duties and Community Empowerment Act requirements to tackle inequality.

### **Improving confidence knowledge and skills for participation**

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 16 | The Council and its partners should review how communities are supported to participate in the partnerships and participate more generally in terms of community capacity building support. |
| 17 | Provide joint training for councillors, community reps and officers on the National Standards for Community Engagement.   |
| 18 | Encourage greater networking and shared learning between Area Partnerships and other groups in each area.   |

## 6. Community Fund

### 6.1 Overview

On the online survey 62 (51%) respondents indicated that they belonged to a group that had received a grant from SBC. These grants included the Local Festival Grant, Community Council Grant and the Village Hall Grant. 17 (14%) said that they or their group had applied to the new Community Fund. While the number is low, the responses do give us an indication of aspects of the Fund that are working and areas for improvement. Most responses found the application process, administration of the grant, criteria for the fund and support from officers to be positive. The areas which need improvement centre on the decision-making process and reporting.

The 17 respondents rated their experience as follows:

- a. 65% said the 'Grant Criteria' is 'Acceptable' to 'Good'.
- b. 59% said that the application process is 'Acceptable' to 'Good'.
- c. 53% said the Grant 'decision-making' process is 'Acceptable' to 'Poor'.
- d. 35% said that the 'Administration of the Grant' is 'Acceptable' to 'Good'.
- e. 29% said the 'Reporting requirements' are 'Acceptable'.
- f. 29% said the 'Support from Council Officers is 'Acceptable' and 29% found it to be 'Good' to 'Very good'.

Comments from respondents regarding the Community Fund.

- "Our latest CF application, [was positive] thanks solely to the officer with whom I have been dealing (a recent addition to the team). The level of service provided by SBC to Community Councils and other groups, particularly in the area of grants/funding/finance, should not depend on the individual officer." **(Online survey response)**
- "Very Poor" for the administration & decision-making processes relates solely to the fact that SBC officer(s) still consider it their role to assess CF applications for "appropriateness", only passing to the Area Partnerships applications which meet that criteria. This is fundamentally undemocratic and in direct contravention of the Communities Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (refer to my previous statements)." **(Online survey response)**
- "There are lots of unknowns about the current funding arrangements – there is a lack of info and engagement around the new funding arrangements for those who will be most affected by the decision." **(Tweeddale Focus Group)**
- "I don't think the process builds skills and confidence for participation No clear process for making the funding decisions, the budgets or how we might vote on bids. It's just do you approve or not. There would have been

a way to introduce and frame the decisions in ways that support peoples learning but it just felt like box ticking.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**

- “Ideas for decentralised funding needs to be more clearly linked to community-led priority planning in decentralised forums.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**
- “Partnerships don’t see the bids that are screened out and people think this is wrong – NB apparently this has never happened, but it is felt to be an issue.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**
- “Participants feel that local reps should be part of the decision-making processes either by voting at the meetings and or in the recommendations process.” **(Berwickshire Focus Group)**
- “Officer recommendations were reported to the last AP meeting. They said they were all right. Councillors were invited to vote with no involvement from anyone else. So why they bothered to bring it to the area partnership I just do not know.” **(Eildon Focus group)**
- “The lack of invest in equalities is already being felt as there is such a lack of cohesion. The biggest area of growth for far-right politics is in rural communities and the impact of issues like mental ill health and violence behind closed doors throws up all sorts of harmful behaviours and creates really vulnerable at-risk communities. The lack of investment in these issues mean that there is a lot of costs stacking up for us in health and other areas.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**

**6.2.** When asked how the Community Fund could be improved respondents from the survey, stakeholders and focus group said that the fund criteria needs to be revisited and the community should be involved in co-designing and co-delivering the Fund as a transparent and accountable participatory budgeting process. There also needs to be more capacity building support to help smaller groups to access the funding.

**Suggestions for improving the Fund include the following:**

- “The council is and should be a service provider as opposed to trying to be a funder of other projects as they are not very good at it.” **(Online survey response)**
- “The questions should be ‘what do you want this money to do around shared purpose, capacity building? It’s about resetting and reframing the fund for capacity building and collaboration skills.” **(Stakeholder - Area Partnership Partner)**
- “More together thinking with organisations in a town to see if better outcomes could be achieved by working together. Don't wish to see money wasted.” **(Online survey response)**

- “Funding support for communities of interest is very important and our role (TSI) of *caretaker trustees* for group with low capacity but high needs is really important for groups who will get bogged down in managing funding or being required to constitute.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**
- “...if the CF is to be open fund you need officer capacity to help groups who don’t have their own capacity to navigate the funding process if you want to be inclusive. that support wasn’t put in place and we therefore think that dropping the requirement to have a constitution isn’t a good idea if this support is lacking without ongoing anchor support.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**
- “All grant applications should come back to the Area Partnership rather than just the 3 that officers have decided should go forward.” **(Cheviot Focus Group)**

**6.3.** Research participants in the online survey, focus groups and stakeholder interviews were asked to identify support needs for communities in applying for the Community Fund. The responses included the need for capacity building with community groups to ensure that there is equal access to the fund, more information about the fund itself and more information about application process.

### Comments

- “Support in form filling if necessary” **(Online survey response)**
- “time and expertise to apply.” **(Online survey response)**
- “Due to my own experience in writing applications, found this relatively straight forward smaller groups who are applying would definitely need to be offered support in collecting the additional information, making sure that infrastructure is in place to record the monies and the spend. They would also need support in making sure that their group was able to deal with the council and they’re at times incessant additional questioning.” **(Online survey response)**
- New applicants would benefit from a presentation of what is required to successfully complete forms/applications. **(Online survey response)**

**6.4** Groups were asked about the impact of their Community Fund grant. The following is a selection of their comments which are broadly positive about how the money is being used:

- “The impact, in this case, is significant, in that the funding is to be used to replace the electrical cabling & sockets on the village green, thereby ensuring the continuity of events such as our Gala Day, charity fund raising events, primary school events, Christmas Tree/Lights, etc.” **(Online survey response)**
- “Our small rural community would be stagnant without any external grant funding which had allowed and facilitated many positive changes.” **(Online survey response)**

- “Improved enjoyment of the Town Centre for Local People and Tourists.” **(Online survey response)**
- “We have evidence that the St Mary's Loch Warden service has been a resounding success; the area is tidier and cleaner with less litter lying around, and plant life is flourishing again (SNH inspection was a great success). Without a funding contribution from SBC the service will cease and the area will fall back to an unkempt mess which will discourage tourists.” **(Online survey response)**

## 6.5 Further integration of the Community Fund

It has been proposed that the Community Council, Village Hall and Local Festivals grant are integrated into the Community Fund and decentralised to Area Partnerships. Of the 121 online responses:

63 (52%) respondents said that the funding for Community Councils should not be become part of the Community Fund (see fig 18). There was a similar response for Local Festivals – 56 (46%) and Federation of Village Halls (fig 19) scored even more strongly at – 64 (53%) [fig 20]. This suggests strongly that there is limited support for this proposal and this has been borne out in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews where support for the idea is negligible. There is strong opinion that these funds should stay separate from the Community Fund.

Fig 18

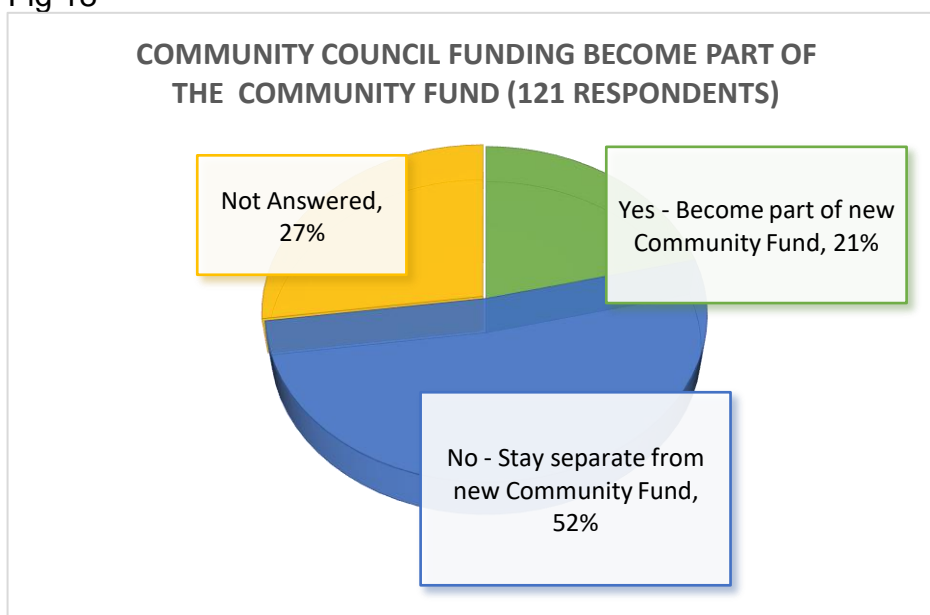


Fig 19

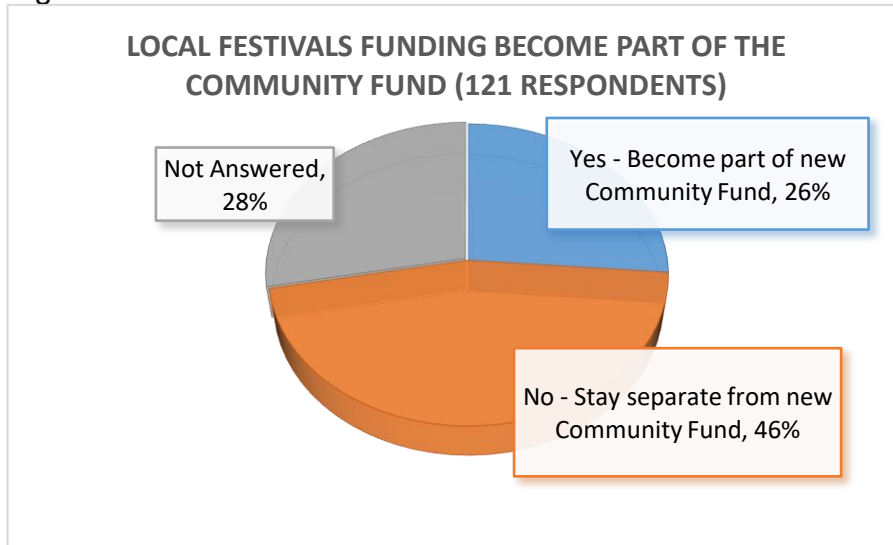
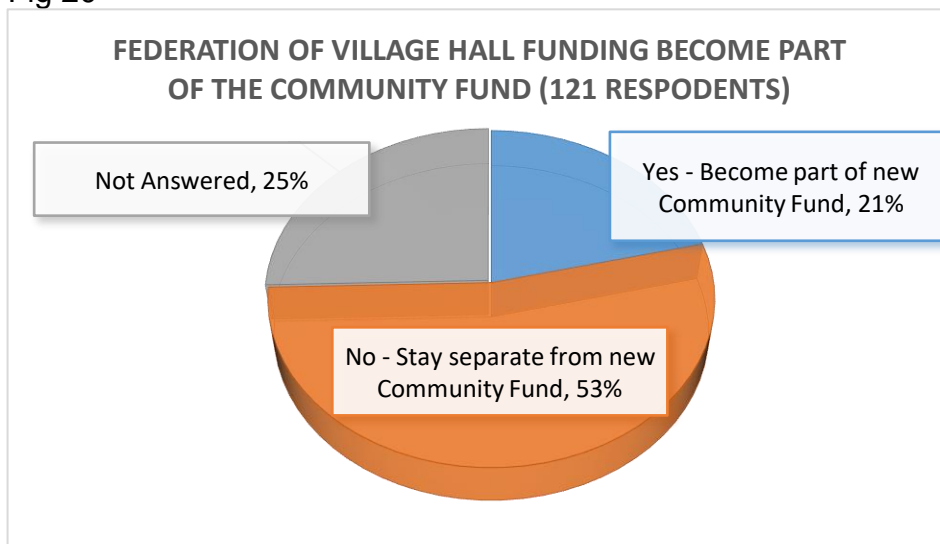


Fig 20



## Comments

“If the funding for these bodies is not to be ring-fenced within the Community Fund it should be left outside it.” **(Online survey response)**

- “Village halls are critical to isolated communities and need to be supported, not left to rot through under funding.” **(Online survey response)**
- “The community councils are entitled to the help already being received to continue the work in the community that doesn’t need to be dealt with directly by the council. Festivals, they should also be a given, as they bring money and tourism to the borders, and the council should assist with this without vote as well, as it is the easier process. If communities have to keep applying for things over and over, going through a timely process, it won’t happen, and events will probably cease as patrons won’t want the aggravation.” **(Online survey response)**

- “Community councils and village halls need guaranteed funding to be sustainable and to support volunteers who run these organisations serving rural communities. There are lots of local festivals and the financial support should be justified and should lead to a self-funding future.” **(Online survey response)**
- “By tying the two would allow for a bigger pot but would also reduce the depth that can be found. Keeping the two separate could encourage other groups to apply.” **(Online survey response)**
- “Huge workload and resource are required to administrate business for the CC, asking us to apply for costs to cover this is unjust and inappropriate. It fails to recognise the increasing importance of the role and the responsibilities it has to deal with.” **(Online survey response)**
- “ you don’t break something unless you are able to make something better. In this context that should be better for the applicants and my cynical head on is that this is about the Council saving money overall” **(Online survey response)**

Note: there was no support in any of the focus groups to bring the Funds together.

### **6.6 Elected Members reflection on the Community Fund**

It was acknowledged that the new arrangements are at a very early stage. The main observations from Members were as follows:

- There is a fear of form filling and little understanding of support available.
- SBC needs to clarify the role of the fund in core funding groups. Members had different understandings of what the criteria allowed in relation to this.
- The future Participatory Budgeting position needs to be clarified for local people.
- Community Councils are important and, although some are more effective than others, they need to be sustainably funded and consistently supported in other ways. The consensus was that CCs should continue to have ring-fenced funding but individual effectiveness should be a greater part of the process.
- Members seemed to feel the same about village halls, where the allocation process was thought to be working reasonably well and “democratically”.
- Where groups benefit from wind farm money it is accepted that they may need less financial support and should target those in greatest need.
- In equalities terms there were views expressed that the Fund was not being adequately targeted to those in greatest need and that smaller communities in more rural areas, and communities of identity or faith benefit less, if at all.



## Community Fund Recommendations

There was a recognition that the fund was in the early stages of implementation and that there was therefore limited experience to base conclusions on, therefore recommendations should be viewed in this light.

- 19 There is also a need to fully clarify the relationships between the Community Fund and plans for participatory budgeting in light of impending legislative targets for this. This will require:
  - Staff to become familiar with the PB Charter which sets out seven key features of what a fair and high quality PB process should look like.
  - A strategic framework for PB within the Council in line with recent Scottish Governments research - [www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018-2/](http://www.gov.scot/publications/evaluation-participatory-budgeting-activity-scotland-2016-2018-2/)
  - Any PB process should ensure that minority and rural communities are integrated into the process through communication and out-reach work to equitably include them in PB.
- 20 Community representatives should be more involved in the decision-making process on Community Fund grants. This should be accessible and transparent and should create a better balance of community and officer influence in the decision-making process.
- 21 The shortage of capacity building support for organisations seeking funding, identified in this research, should be further explored and addressed. Solutions should be explored with capacity building organisations locally.
- 22 There is a need to further promote and clarify the Community Funds overall purpose, criteria, application and decision-making processes.
- 23 Further integration of the Village Halls and Community Council grants into the Community Fund should not proceed at this time. This is due to a widely held belief that aspects of the current systems are working reasonably well and that full integration was the “wrong solution” at this time and requires further discussion with communities.

## 7. Essential building blocks for successful community empowerment

Although the primary brief for the review was to gather views on the Area Partnerships and the Community Fund for Scottish Borders Council, participants made many observations related to a wider set of issues which many participants saw as essential for successful community empowerment. The emerging view across the study was that thinking about the partnership structures in isolation would be a mistake and that the Council and its community planning partners need to consider these wider cross cutting issues as a whole in order to be able to successfully deliver their wider aims of involving people in decision making and improving services. With this in mind the recommendations in this section should be seen as applying to Community Planning Partnerships as a whole and not only to Scottish Borders Council.

### 7.1 The key role of community capacity building (CCB)

A large number of those participating in the study raised issues about the importance of community capacity building, not only in supporting community activity generally, but also in creating the conditions for community empowerment and involvement in the Area Partnership process. Most believed there is not enough community capacity building support to sustain activity locally and that this also had implications for delivering on commitments like the Locality Plan.

“We no longer have the community workers we used to have and I think people have really suffered from the fact that they no longer have the support from these posts. We need many more development and community workers to help with work on the ground and the voluntary sector are being asked to do too much.” **Local resident – focus group**

Though some organisations do get support there was a view that consistency mattered e.g. community councils and other representative groups need to be able to rely on good quality trusted community development advice and assistance if they were to be able to be key building blocks of participation as part of the “wider ecology” of community voices.

Investment in CCB needs to include empowering support which mobilises activism – and creates knowledge and skills for public participation. There are currently too few staff supporting local people in leadership positions to understand underlying ideas like inclusion, equality and empowerment.

“The capacity building is not what the council’s delivering in the borders. What I mean by Community Capacity Building CCB ... is standing alongside the community and helping to animate people to become activists to support everyone in their community and build their skills and confidence, knowledge and experience to take their ideas forward. This really isn’t happening in most places and the TSI hasn’t got the reach or resources to do it all. These gaps

really restrict how communities can be involved in local structures and policy influencing roles.” **Local resident – focus group**

Access to community capacity building support was also thought to be important in supporting groups facing additional barriers – even if approaches to issues like governance are relaxed to enable their involvement.

“ if the CF is to be an open fund you need officer capacity to help groups who don’t have their own capacity to navigate the funding process if you want to be inclusive. That support wasn’t put in place and we therefore think that dropping the requirement to have a constitution isn’t a good idea if this support is lacking.” **(Equalities and cross community focus group)**

The emphasis on CCB was very evident in the survey, focus groups and stakeholder interviews, and it is very clear that participants from communities and all CPP partners view it as essential to the delivery and sustainability of community involvement. This widespread concern suggests that an overall Community Capacity Building strategy is needed to articulate a vision, describe potential supports and address the allocation of roles and resources to appropriately skilled agencies and projects, identifying gaps where required. SCDC would also suggest this is needed to enable compliance with the statutory duties in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. This should be linked to the Community Learning & Development (CLD) Plan although it is recognised that this is an area of CLD which is poorly resourced. There is therefore a need to look self critically at what is being provided by a number of CPP partner agencies, where the gaps are and if they could do more.

“I think we need a common understanding of what CCB and empowerment means and how it links to inclusion and equality.” **Local resident – focus group**

#### **Community Capacity Building Recommendations**

24. Review the local Community Learning & Development Plan to assess where the relative strengths challenges in CCB are.
25. Develop a CCB working group involving Community Representatives the TSI, SBC other CPP partners e.g. NHS health improvement.
26. Consider strategic investment by SBC in capacity building services.
27. Initiate discussion with CPP partners, Scottish Government and other possible funders about where resources to support increased local CCB could be sourced.
28. Support communities themselves to access resources to develop their own community capacity building resources.
29. Lay the foundations for a holistic community development strategy for the Borders with corresponding local iterations linked to the Community Learning & Development Partnerships

### 7.3 Culture and relationships

Both local residents and many staff across all sectors recognised the need to achieve culture change if empowerment, locality planning and therefore the Partnerships are to be successful. It was felt by a significant number of participants that confidence in achieving this would be much higher if re-design work was independently facilitated. This issue partly arose from a sense that goodwill is being sapped by disappointment in the current process due to unhelpful organisational behaviours arising from the prevailing culture which many local people believe is not genuinely empowering.

“The partnerships are often about telling us things that the Council have done and not really even asking if we agree. We’ve got the script and the PowerPoint and this is how amazing it all is, its post rationalisation.”

**Community rep – focus group**

Many people questioned whether the culture allowed for communities to really achieve change.

“Ability to influence is key to the whole thing, if you are there and have a point of view and they just ignore that point of view there is really no point in being there.” **Community rep - focus group**

This view was also shared by some respondents inside public institutions.

“we need to make our interactions more like pulling in the same direction. Sometimes it can seem like a tug of war with at least four different interests pulling the same rope.” **Stakeholder - Senior Council Officer**

For some, the impact of participation was not helping to address what they viewed as extremely serious real-world issues.

“There is this sense of powerlessness about some issues like homelessness in our village when there are empty homes. No matter what we say it seems we can’t get anything done.” **Local resident - focus group**

Other participants were very clear that the traditional methods of groups like community councils may also be unlikely to suit local people and that the culture shift idea needed to encompass new approaches to community and citizen organisation in order to “move with the times”. It was felt that the way people discuss things has changed, and we still have “traditional structures”. Resolving this problem needs to look at supporting the development of common values, knowledge and skills.

Responses suggested that many of those in public agencies were willing to work differently but don’t necessarily know how to do so. Addressing this requires staff training in how to work effectively with communities and in facilitation skills. For communities culture change will require developing their ability to work in more inclusive, accessible ways to bring more people on board. What is clear is that an underdeveloped culture for participation and empowerment affects works with the other factors described in this report to create conditions that can’t deliver real partnership. One focus group participant perceived the reality as follows,

“I have gone to all the meetings for my area and there hasn’t been a single one where the statutory agencies didn’t outnumber local people and local peoples contributions are not recorded in the minutes despite people making articulate contributions and proposals.” **Local resident - focus Group**

#### **Culture and Relationship Recommendations**

30. Use the Audit Scotland principles to develop discussion involving community representatives, partner organisations, Elected Members and others to develop local principles for community empowerment.
31. Co-produce a local scrutiny process which builds confidence in the empowerment processes for community planning, including the Area Partnerships, and which provide routes to raise issues and resolve disputes.

### **7.4 The Importance of learning**

Achieving the outcomes identified by this study and the policy ambitions of the empowerment process will require all partners to be willing to learn from each other and from others.

Clarity about the potential and constraints on the Community Empowerment Act and other duties is important as a bedrock for this. The accuracy of how all partners interpret the legislative and policy framework for empowerment locally is a key issue it is therefore very important that the learning aims for supporting the empowerment process also involve clarifying the rights and duties affecting all partners in the process.

“I think time spent investing in awareness raising about standards of community engagement and what that really means would be time very well spent. This is required for all partners but probably more so the institutional partners” **Stakeholder – SBC Officer**

Where these are subject to interpretation, a respectful and progressive dialogue is needed to agree what these mean for the empowerment process in Scottish Borders especially since current differences in analysis are undermining progress.

It is worth emphasising that participants also thought that particular training for local reps was an important part of the process in order to ensure that they are equipped for their roles.

“Going back to the suggested training, it’s really important that representatives are supported to understand their roles as representatives in terms of being an informed voice on behalf of a range of folk in their communities not just an individual voice. Sometimes this means they need to be expressing more than one point of view.” **Stakeholder – SBC Officer**

The training agenda is also important for staff facilitating dialogues:

“What the APs have been good at is understanding community needs but they do not have the skills to run a locally rooted sustained forum. The effectiveness and the skills of the facilitator is quite variable. There is not a recognition of the skills and expertise that different parts of the community could bring to co-designing or co-delivering the partnership process.”

**Stakeholder – CPP Partner**

Understanding the interplay between vision, rights, duties and potential for empowerment is crucial if partners can meet the challenges and chart a course to improvement. Central to this is reaching agreement on direction and this should be part of learning and other overarching activity,

“Not sure there is much shared understanding of what better looks like. It would be really good if we good do a piece of work to explore this and adjust the direction before people become too disillusioned.” **Stakeholder - CPP partner**

### **Useful learning from other locations**

It is helpful to draw attention to examples of good practice from other parts of Scotland in the planning, promoting and implementation of community empowerment. This relates directly to the recommendations on the importance of learning from each other as local people, Elected Members, staff in public services including those in community planning roles.

Pro-participation policy has been developing over the last decade and has intensified since the implementation of the Community Empowerment Act in 2016. However, the full impact of its provisions across Scotland are still emerging. This is taking place in a context of other challenges arising from austerity affecting the funding of the services which support empowerment and the ability of public agencies to respond to needs expressed by empowered communities. Despite this there are many examples of where community planning partnerships have developed innovative approaches to their work. Some examples of these are listed below.

### **Promotion of the CPP concept and the structures for tackling inequality**

Aberdeen Community Planning Partnership has produced an innovative video on the purpose and ongoing work of community planning in the city as part of its work to reach out to citizens.

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/>

### **Structures for delivering community empowerment**

Aberdeen has locality structures, which target the most disadvantaged sections of the city in line with the duties of the Act. These are clearly described on the Council's website including how they relate to thematic aspects of the CPP's work and therefore how locality planning structures relate to wider decision making processes.

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-planning-structure/>

Communities are represented by Aberdeen Civic Forum which unites community councils and other kinds of community organisations in the City

<https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/strengthening-community-councils>

### **A helpful local policy framework**

The Aberdeen process is supported by a wider Community Engagement group which has been operating since shortly after the Community Empowerment Act was passed.

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-engagement-group/>

This brings community level stakeholders and officers together to ensure that the [Engagement, Participation and Empowerment Strategy](#) which outlines how all residents of Aberdeen can contribute to life in the city is implemented.

### **Specific Empowerment Policy**

SCDC advocates clear planning for participation and empowerment which integrates the purpose, policy and practice of the work including how resources are identified and deployed for community capacity building. In some areas this is done via the process of development of Community Learning and Development Plans.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/community-learning-and-development-planning-2018-21>

However in some areas, as is the case in the Scottish Borders, the CLD service is not currently delivering community capacity building for community empowerment which raises issues about whether this process is the best, or only place, for planning what is now a statutory duty to resource Community Empowerment and which by necessity needs to involve the work of other community planning partners such as Third Sector Interfaces, Public Health colleagues and others.

Several areas are taking a more integrated look at how to deliver empowerment aims and an example of this is West Dunbartonshire Council and CPP. They have commissioned SCDC to help them produce a West Dunbartonshire Community Empowerment Action Strategy and Action Plan based on widespread consultation over a period of a year with local organisations at local meetings and via an online survey.

<https://www.scdc.org.uk/west-dunbartonshire>

### **Empowerment and whole systems transformation**

Perhaps the most complete example of how community empowerment is being linked to wider transformation and service reform approaches is in East Ayrshire Council through their Vibrant Communities initiative.

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/CouncilAndGovernment/About-the-Council/East%20Ayrshire%20Council%20Structure/Safer-Communities/HousingandCommunities/VibrantCommunities.aspx>

East Ayrshire have been implementing a holistic approach over a number of years linking service reform, culture change and a major investment in community development in the settlements across the area.

Among lots of very useful information about the approach is a [film of the story](#) of Vibrant Communities and an engaging newsletter on implementing of their [transformation strategy](#).

### **A Community Based Action Planning**

A key element of the process in East Ayrshire is community-based action planning. This is where communities themselves are supported to produce their own action plans based on a thorough process of community engagement locally. This grassroots process is key to the success of Vibrant Communities and the Council's website provides more information....

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/CouncilAndGovernment/CommunityCouncilsAndAssemblies/CommunityCouncils-Information/Community-Led-Action-Plans.aspx>

...and examples of well-established plans

<https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/Resources/PDF/C/Cumnock%20Community%20Led%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

Other authorities are also supporting community-based action planning and Argyle and Bute Council commissioned SCDC to support it by developing an online toolkit that communities could use to produce their own plans.

<https://www.communitytoolkit.net/>

### **Wider Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 implementation**

It is important to consider how other key aspects of community empowerment are promoted and planned. A key aspect which is gathering pace in Scotland as result of the statutory requirements of the Community Empowerment Act is the process of Participation Requests where local people have new rights to engage in dialogue about how public services operate

Aberdeen City CPP has developed integrated promotional and support materials for communities wishing to make request and these are prominent on the CPP website.

<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Engagement-participation-empowerment-strategy.pdf>

Dundee City Council has developed an e-Learning module on range of empowerment issues including participation requests, participatory budgeting and the provisions of the legislation itself.

<https://www.dundee.gov.uk/service-area/neighbourhood-services/housing-and-communities/community-empowerment>



## Learning Recommendations

32. Develop a local programme of key knowledge for Community Empowerment, engagement and deliberative democracy aimed at local people, officers, partner agencies and Elected Members
33. Develop a programme of learning visits to other areas of Scotland where good practice may be developing as described above, and lessons are being learnt.
34. Reinvest the learning from the process into the other strands of operational work resulting from the review

### 7.6 Action on inequality

As the section on policy context clearly shows, the expectation is that Locality Planning is a key function of the Area Partnerships and is expected by law to address inequality directly and specifically. In Scottish Borders the authority has elected to deliver locality planning, and therefore the Area Partnerships in all areas, on a more universal basis. This is technically allowable in the legislation and other authorities have done similar things. This makes it more important than ever that there is a clear plan for ensuring that the Area Partnerships can support the emergence of, and respond to, an agenda that addresses inequality. This should address action on socio economic grounds and also in terms of protected characteristics under the Equalities Act

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/equality-act-2010> and Human Rights policy in Scotland <http://www.snaprights.info/>

Although intensive inequality indicated by high SIMD rates is rare in the area, participants raised significant hidden poverty in terms of low wages, high living costs, poor quality housing, particularly in the private rented sector linked to estates.

They also highlighted the cumulative impact of these and others in rural areas where issues like transport impacts on the ability to sustain work leading to the view that transport in some communities was really a “civil rights” issue. Locality planning and the fora which support it, need to be able to raise these issues sensitively and promote social solidarity not just amongst those affected by it but also in the wider community if the issues are to have sufficient priority.

“If you have a really good inclusive local forum you can create an understanding around different kinds of experiences that are hard for other people to access in day to day life. This can create a sense of acceptance and ownership of how to do things differently for the benefit of all in communities.” **Equalities focus group CPP partner**

It was noted that working on equalities can challenge how many people see how local decisions should be made since,

“We assume that the majority is best but sometimes the minority has such an overriding case that we really need to look at the needs of the minority” **Local resident - focus group**

In terms of empowerment of those experiencing inequality it is important to note that processes and structures need to anticipate how difficult it is for those experiencing inequality to become involved in tackling it. This was also highlighted by participants in the research,

“I think of your struggling to survive on minimum wage, bringing up a family or trying to get the money for the card meter – you actually don’t have the energy to turn round and say “I have rights and I will fight for these”. **Local resident – focus group**

Some Area Partnerships are better at dealing with equality issues - and better attended by communities generally - challenging the view that one undermines the other. Several stakeholders also felt that the current processes lack clear links to poverty work, making it unclear where the work of the current child poverty strategy and the previous inequality theme group sat in the new structures.

How partners help or hinder raising equalities issues is incredibly important and we must be aware of competing values and interests that can bring people in communities into conflict over these issues.

“These issues of power, skills and confidence are really fundamental for equality. We work in an area where over 30% of kids are in receipt of free schools meals and their parents are often migrant workers in the low wage agricultural economy. There is a real need for social housing and the Council wants to respond to this but white middle class home owners have objected. The community has worked really hard to get that housing through but the balance of power sits with powerful retired, middle class, white vested interests object. Power isn’t just held by institutions it can sit with those opposing progressive change for their own reasons” **CPP Stakeholder**

Ultimately, the focus on tackling inequality was felt by many to be insufficient and that the economic and wider societal cost of failing to effectively address these was very high.

“The lack of investment in equalities is already being felt as there is such a lack of cohesion. The biggest area of growth for far-right politics is in rural communities and the impact of issues like mental ill health and violence behind closed doors throws up all sorts of harmful behaviours and creates really vulnerable at risk communities. The lack of investment in these issues mean that there is a lot of costs stacking up for us in health and other areas” **Local resident - focus group**

Many of those responding to the research agree on the need to improve how the CPP reaches those affected by socio economic inequality, including those with long term health conditions or disabilities. This is also a duty in the Community Empowerment Act and it is therefore important to consider how the Area

Partnerships can provide routes through which these citizens in greatest need can be engaged.

A review of what key partner organisations, like the NHS and Registered Social Landlords, could bring to this challenge is needed. These CPP stakeholder organisations felt that in addition to their value as a contact point with tenants or patients, these organisations, through their public health and wider housing role activities, are a vital part of reaching people in order to better understand their experience and highlight the inequality they face. For this reason, there is more that could be done to engage these partners in supporting engagement and empowerment and there is clear willingness from them to do this, providing resources are available to support the process.

### **Action on Inequality Recommendations**

35. Involve local organisations in reviewing the issues which address or inhibit delivering equality in Scottish Borders in terms of:

- How resources are being targeted
- How equality is being addressed in CPP plans and structures
- How effectively communities of interest and identity are included in Local Outcome Improvement Planning and locality planning
- Ensure that active meaningful involvement of those with lived experience of inequality is integrated into empowerment improvement plans and Community Capacity Building Strategy

36. Review NHS and Registered Social Landlords' role in tackling inequality with a view to maximising their willingness to help link these communities to Locality Planning.

## 8. The Community Planning Partnership - Next Steps

Based on these overall findings we propose that the Council, CPP and its partners in communities consider working together to co-produce agreed principles, refreshed structures and a more supportive environment for community empowerment. Early actions which could help achieve this would include:

### Community Planning Partnership Recommendations

37. Dialogue to implement these findings should take place across the CPP and directly with communities.
38. Review existing community capacity support across the CPP with a view to improving co-ordination and increasing resources to support community empowerment at grassroots level - and participation in wider decision-making processes.
39. Identify, audit and promote existing opportunities for engagement and empowerment as part of an ongoing improvement plan linked to the CPP's aims and responding to the recent Best Value Review mentioned earlier.
40. Ensure that these actions involve a range of partner organisations e.g. learners' forums, residents' associations, CLD partnerships etc.
41. Additional resources for removing barriers to participation and delivering community capacity building should be identified by the CPP as a whole as well as SBC. In recognition of severe pressure on public sector budgets this may require bids to external funders.

### 8.1 In conclusion

Although this research suggests that there is limited confidence in the Area Partnership structures as they are currently formulated, there is no apparent desire for these to be discontinued completely now. Nor is there a widespread desire to return to the more firmly Elected Member led Area Forums. We would suggest that, if the recommendations of this study are accepted by the Council, Community Planning Partners and communities, a longer-term process of involving local people in redesigning more suitable structures is implemented.

The research suggests that integration of funding of the community councils, village halls and festivals into the Community Fund is not supported by those taking part. There is a need for renewed promotion of the CF and to review how local groups are supported to access the fund. Other concerns or perceptions of the Fund seem to relate peoples' views of the wider area partnership process.

We suggest that to maximise the value of the research:

- A working group consisting of local representatives, elected members and officers is convened, drawing on the findings.
- The working group should consider whether there are implications for the current locality plans.
- Feedback to each of the 5 Area Partnerships the results of this research, and in partnership with those who attend Area Partnerships - plus SBC officers,

CPP partner reps and local community reps, look at short term improvements for each Area Partnership”

## **Appendix 1**

### **Focus Group - Topic Guide**

#### **Area Partnerships**

**What do you see as the main benefits of local people’s participation in decision making?**

**What kind of processes and structures have you been participating in that worked well? (over the last 5 years)**

**What do you think of the Current Area Partnerships.**

- As a process for delivering local empowerment?
- In terms of how effectively it is being implemented?
- Its strengths and any challenges?
- How could the approach be strengthened?
- What local people think of it?

**How well do you think the APs link up with**

- Other formal structures – eg Integrated Joint Health & Social Care, community planning, economic development or other partnerships?
- Community Councils or other community groups working on issues and services?
- Wider aims for involving and empowering local citizens?

**What supports might Local people and community groups need to be more involved and effective in the partnerships in terms of**

- Support and advice?
- Practical assistance?
- Being representative eg identifying issues and feeding back?

**Generally – is there anything you want to add about participation across the borders and how it could be improved?**

#### **The Community Fund**

- **How familiar are you with the new arrangements for funding?**
- **How well is the new Community Fund supporting community activity in terms of**
  - Supporting community activity across the area?
  - Targeting resources to those who need it?
  - The way decisions are made?
- **How do you think the new approach improves the previous arrangements?**
- **What do you think would strengthen the way the fund operates?**

- **The council is now planning to combine the funds for Community Councils, local festivals and the federation of village halls – what do think about this?**

## Appendix 2

### CPP Stakeholder – Topic Guide

This interview is designed to hear what a sample of key community planning partners and community infrastructure representatives think of the current arrangements and whether aspects of them need to be improved. The individual interviews are part of an approach which also includes an online survey and focus groups.

**What is your involvement with the Local Area partnerships/community funding process?**

**How do you see them supporting community activity & empowerment locally?**

**What do you understand as the drivers for the development of the new Area Partnerships/new Community Fund arrangements?**

**What do you see as the strengths and challenges in the Current Area Partnerships**

- As a process for delivering local empowerment?
- How effectively they are being implemented?
- Their strengths and any challenges?
- How could the approach be strengthened?
- What local people think of it?

**How well does the Area Partnership link to -**

- Other formal structures – eg Integrated Joint Health & Social Care, community planning, economic development or other partnerships?
- Community Councils or other community groups working on issues and services?
- Wider aims for involving and empowering local citizens?

### **The Community Fund**

- How familiar are you with the new arrangements for funding?
- How well is the new Community Fund supporting community activity in terms of:
  - Supporting community activity across the area?
  - Targeting resources to those who need it?
  - The way decisions are made?
- How do you think the new approach improves the previous arrangements?
- What do you think would strengthen the way the fund operates?
- The council is now planning to combine the funds for Community Councils, local festivals and the federation of village halls – what do think about this?

## Appendix 3

### Elected Members – Topic Guide

**What were your key reasons for supporting change in the Area Partnership Structures to the way that they are now in terms of:**

- Compliance with legislation like the CE Act?
- For improving Local services in the community?
- For strengthening local democracy?
- Complimenting your own roles as members?
- Supporting comms to support themselves?

**What do you think now about the Area Partnerships now?**

- As a process for increasing empowerment?
- In terms of how effectively they are being implemented?
- What local people/community groups think of the partnerships?
- Its strengths and any challenges?
- What supports could strengthen the process and participation in it?

**How well do you think the APs link up with:**

- Decision making - Council services, Integrated Joint Health & Social Care, community planning etc
- Communities - Community Councils or other rep community groups working on issues and services?

### The Community Fund

**Why did you want to change the previous arrangements for funding?**

**How well is the new Community Fund currently:**

- Supporting community activity across the area?
- Targeting resources fairly to those who need it?

**What do you think would strengthen the way the fund operates?**

**Its proposed to combine the funds for Community Councils, local festivals and the federation of village halls into the community fund– what do you currently think about this?**



**sedc**

scottish  
community  
development  
centre