



Development
Trusts Association
Scotland

A Thriving Community-led Network



DTA Scotland

2023 Membership Survey Findings

Summary

Research and Insights Team

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Introduction

Our vision is for 'A Scotland that respects, embraces and supports sustainable and thriving community-led and owned organisations, working in urban, rural and island communities. Places where citizens have the powers and investment to develop their communities sustainably and overcome economic, environmental, social and cultural challenges.' To achieve this vision, Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) provides support and advice to community-led and owned organisations across the nation.

The Development Trust movement started over 20 years ago in Scotland and DTAS has developed its offer of support in line with the needs and demands of communities. The creation, evolution and growth of Development Trusts in Scotland remains our focus, alongside our Community Ownership Support Service to support asset transfer and right to buys and our Community Shares Scotland/Democratic Finance team to help diversify income streams. Together, we aim to create strong community infrastructures and support thriving communities.

Many development trusts across the country are established in response to similar challenges: cuts to public services, community asset closures, increasing deprivation, lack of access to essential services, aging communities, lack of job opportunities and much more. DTAS members provide a diverse range of services and activities in response to those challenges with the goal of improving the social, economic, and environmental welfare of their community.

The DTAS membership has grown from 270 to 347 (full/provisional) members in 2024 plus 90 aspiring members, organisations that are providing vital services and local solutions, delivered by local people, on what matters to them. A development trust is a community-owned and led organisation, working to combine place-based action with an enterprising approach and as a membership organisation DTAS aims to ensure that each organisation meets our membership criteria.

Since our last survey in 2019, a global pandemic (Covid-19) saw the community sector as a whole step up to the challenge and deliver emergency support. Our members throughout Scotland proved how agile and responsive they are, using local people in support roles and reaching the most vulnerable in their communities. As we got out of the pandemic, the challenges continued with the cost-of-living crisis, increasing demand for essential services locally and an influx of public and privately owned buildings being put up for sale in communities across Scotland.

Although there are many challenges that we are facing across the country, our members are also grasping the opportunities to bring life back to land and buildings, creating jobs and addressing health, environmental and social needs. A development trust is community-led and owned, place-based and enterprising, providing local solutions to challenges and delivering a diverse range of businesses and services/activities such as, community energy schemes, shops, pubs, community hubs, youth and elderly services, employability, active travel, woodlands, and training/volunteering opportunities.

Our Teams

The Community Ownership Support Service

The Community Ownership Support Service (COSS), delivered by DTAS, is a national programme that provides a focal point and central resource for asset transfer and community ownership activity in Scotland, providing information, expert advice, guidance, and support at all stages of the community asset transfer or acquisition process.

Delivered for DTAS members and other community-led organisations in Scotland, this programme aims to support the sustainable transfer of assets into community ownership, saving and developing services and creating jobs and opportunities for local communities.

COSS provides a pre-and post-acquisition Facilities Management service, working with members and community-led groups to help improve the operational and environmental efficiency of their buildings.

The team also facilitates the Scottish Universities Land Unit (SULU) which provides access to law-students from Dundee, Glasgow, and Strathclyde Universities to conduct research into land-related questions.

Democratic Finance Scotland

Our Community Shares Scotland team is evolving into the Democratic Finance Scotland team, building on the success of helping communities across Scotland to raise £20 million in community shares finance since 2014. This community shares support has activated 18,000 citizen investors and helped launch 70 community-owned enterprises including hydro schemes, shops, pubs, and community hubs. The evolution to Democratic Finance Scotland, in partnership with Scottish Communities Finance Ltd, is due to an increasing need and demand for communities to diversify their sources of income. This programme will encourage a move away from grant dependency, promote citizen investment and harness community-led opportunities in renewable energy.

The program aims to:

- Encourage communities to move away from grant dependency.
- Promote citizen investment into democratically controlled community enterprises.
- Boost and circulate local wealth.
- The core goal of this program is to enrich communities and encourage local economies that work better for the people who live there.

Executive Summary

The Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS) represents development trusts across Scotland; at the time of writing DTAS has members in all 32 Local Authority areas in Scotland, apart from Dundee City.

Development trusts are **community-led organisations, working across town, city, rural and island locations, combining community-led action with an enterprising approach**. They aim to bring about **social, economic and environmental renewal**, creating wealth in communities and keeping it there.

There is no legal definition of a development trust, but these organisations have 4 distinct characteristics:



Independent, and community owned and led.



Engaged in the economic, environmental, and social improvements of a defined area.



Committed to working in partnership arrangements that are initiated by the community.



Have an enterprising approach.

DTAS conducts a comprehensive survey of our membership every 3 to 4 years to gauge the size and scope of the development trust movement, provide evidence for advocacy efforts, and better represent our members. The 2023 survey achieved a robust 51% response rate, with 173 out of 342 members participating. To ensure representativity, responses were analysed based on geographic location, rurality, and deprivation. Overall, the survey response was considered representative of the Development Trust movement.

Data collection utilised Microsoft Forms, with subsequent analysis focusing on six core areas: organisation size, activities/services, asset ownership/leasing, renewable energy ownership/community benefit funding, alternative financing, and income/grant reliance. Statistical analysis involved creating pivot tables, linear graphs, and identifying significant trends using R-squared values.

Limitations included the lack of detail in government indicators for deprivation, hindering nuanced analysis of rural and island deprivation, and the inability to compare with previous surveys due to changes in questionnaires and the unmeasured impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Readers are urged to consider these limitations when interpreting the data for practical purposes.

Key Findings

DTAS Membership at a Glance:

- Regions with the highest concentration of development trusts per capita are **Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney Islands, Argyll and Bute, and the Highlands**.
- Areas in the central belt, **North Lanarkshire, Inverclyde, Falkirk, and East Renfrewshire**, have lower concentrations of development trusts per capita.
- In terms of absolute numbers, Highland (66), Argyll and Bute (35), Dumfries and Galloway (25), and Glasgow City (21) have the highest number of DTAS members.

Staffing and Board Members:

- 81% of development trusts employ paid staff, with respondents reporting a total of 1,275 individuals employed across Scotland.
- There's a strong negative linear relationship between SIMD and staffing, with organisations in the most deprived areas being the most likely to employ paid staff.
- The percentage of development trusts employing staff increases with their annual income.
- On average, development trusts have 9 board members, with over 80% of members having under 10 board members.

Volunteers:

- Average of 28 volunteers per development trusts. DTAS members in SIMD quintile 1 have a higher average of volunteers.
- Remote small-towns have the highest average number of volunteers (48) compared with other SURC categories.
- Asset-owning development trusts tend to have more active volunteers than those without assets.
- Development trusts with staff tend to have more volunteers than those without staff.

Membership:

- The average number of members for development trusts is 212.
- Rural small-towns have the highest average membership (440).
- Development trusts in more deprived areas have a larger membership, and those in affluent areas have a smaller membership.

Grant Funding and Reliance:

- Large urban areas and remote rural areas receive the highest average grant funding.
- Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eileanan Siar receive the most grant funding per capita.
- Almost half of respondents are heavily reliant on grant funding, with groups from more deprived areas being more reliant on it.
- Development trusts who own assets tend to be less reliant on grant funding, and those without staff are less reliant on grants compared to those with staff.

Earned Income:

- A total earned income of **£16,032,848** per annum was reported, representing **33%** of the reported total annual income.
- Island communities stand out with the highest average annual earned income at £215,937, with 92% of island groups reporting some source of earned income. Earned income constitutes 49% of total annual income for Island development trusts.
- Groups in more deprived areas (SIMD 1 and 2) have a higher amount of average earned income in £ compared to those in more affluent areas. **However, earned income in SIMD 1 areas constitutes only 27% of their total annual income, below the average of 33%.**
- There has been a decline in both the total amount of income earned by development trusts since 2019 and the proportion of earned income to total annual income.

Alternative Finance Options:

- 64% of DTAS members engage with alternative finance models.
- Renewable Energy (Community Benefit Funds) is the most popular form of alternative finance, with 24.7% of development trusts engaging in this model.
- Crowdfunding, Philanthropic Giving, and Community Lottery are also widely used, with engagement ranging from 17.4% to 20%.
- Development trusts from remote rural areas are the most significant users of alternative finance.

Renewable Energy:

- Development trusts in rural and island areas are more likely to own renewable energy installations compared to those in urban and central belt regions.
- Development trusts owning renewable energy installations have a more diverse portfolio of assets and are engaged in a greater number of activities.
- Development trusts owning renewable energy installations exhibit lower reliance on grant funding.
- Development trusts with renewable energy installations report significantly higher levels of earned income.

Community Benefit Funding:

- 23% of surveyed development trusts receive community benefit funds.
- Most development trusts receiving community benefit funding are in the rural areas of the Highlands, Scottish Borders, Argyll and Bute, and Dumfries and Galloway, with only a few in urban areas.
- The average duration of community benefit funding arrangements is 18 years, with annual payments ranging from £2,000 to £672,783. Most groups receive less than £100,000 per year.
- 77% of groups receiving community benefit funds are based in rural areas, primarily on mainland Scotland.
- 87% of development trusts receiving community benefit funds own at least one asset.
- CBF-receiving groups report lower earned income compared to non-receiving groups, with 44% reporting £0 in earned income.

Asset Ownership:

- 77% of surveyed development trusts own some type of physical asset, with buildings, land/woodland/forestry, and vehicles being the most common types.
- Island communities have the highest prevalence of vehicle and housing ownership.
- Most asset-owning groups fall within SIMD quintile 3.
- Rural areas, islands, and small-towns are more likely to own assets than urban areas.
- Asset-owning groups tend to own a variety of assets, with island groups owning the most diverse range.
- Urban development trusts who were surveyed have a lower-than-average rate of asset ownership.
- Development trusts with assets are more likely to have paid staff and deliver more activities per week compared to those without assets.

Asset Leasing:

- 35% of surveyed groups lease assets, with an even split between those leasing land, buildings, or both.
- Groups in the most deprived areas (SIMD quintile 1) and large urban areas (SURC 1) are more likely to lease assets.
- There is a strong positive linear correlation between earned income and likelihood of asset leasing, suggesting that leased assets often provide a source of earned income for groups.

Activities:

- On average, development trusts deliver 9 activities a week.
- Events/festivals/markets are the most common activities delivered by development trusts.
- Environmental initiatives like biodiversity restoration, community growing/allotments, and climate action are increasingly prioritised, especially by development trusts in SIMD quintile 5 and urban areas.
- Active travel and community/sports centres are the most popular aspiring activities.
- There's a strong correlation ($R = 0.82$) between asset ownership and activity count, indicating that owning assets enables development trusts to offer more services.
- Employing staff positively correlates with higher activity counts.