

DEMOCRACY MATTERS 2

DTAS Consultation response

Development Trusts Association Scotland is a membership network of over 300 community owned and democratically led development trusts, from all parts of the country - islands, rural areas, cities and everywhere in between. This consultation response reflects the views captured from selected members in our network, through a series of hosted conversations as part of an SG funded joint project with SCDC, to draw out in depth community views on this consultation; from our members more broadly at a DTAS Debates session on local democracy; and from conversations with and the reflections of our staff and board who encounter varying views and experiences of local democracy across our network day in and day out.

The nature of our network, and the origins of our organisation build on a presumption of localism and subsidiarity - that communities know best the solutions for their own problems, and when empowered and resourced, can effectively tackle them, and that power should reside as close to the people it affects as possible. We have seen effective local responses to system failure in action across our network time and time again, never more evident than in the early years of the Covid-19 pandemic. The scale of most current local authorities, with some covering extensive geographical areas (for example Highland Council) and others serving very large populations (Glasgow City Council for example) means that there can be a perceived distance from the communities they serve, and diverse communities are met with uniform responses which don't always suit.

We advocate for more local democracy, not with rose-tinted glasses, because we also see that it's hard work, and humans, being human will bring all their flaws, attempts to grasp power, and promote their own agendas, to whatever power structure is in place – national or local. However, the experience of our near neighbours in Europe, with local democracy operating successfully at the kind of scales we are advocating for, tells us that it is possible, desirable, and there is absolutely no reason why we couldn't do this here in Scotland too.

This is not a process that can happen overnight but the beginning of a cultural change and a much-needed shift away from the centralisation of the past decades. It's a shift that must be resourced to match responsibility, and must be part of a wider system change, integrated with policies such as the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, Community Wealth Building (which is built on local economic democracy), Land Reform and Wellbeing, Sustainability and a Just Transition to be meaningful and successful. The lack of available resource to implement local democratic reform, and even to support existing efforts is a concern universally for this network.

We share our views in good faith, that the Scottish Government will follow through on this consultation, but we also want to reflect the challenge back from our network, that the feelings of disempowerment and apathy frequently described stem from too many consultations, and too many regeneration initiatives with not enough lasting positive change in response. We note a gradual shift of communities over the past years, taking on more and more assets and services from local authorities as council budgets are cut, often without any additional funding to the community and communities are nervous that this process could carry on the same trend.

1. HOW COULD YOUR COMMUNITY USE THE TYPES OF POWERS SET OUT IN THE FUTURE SCENARIO BOX TO ACHIEVE ITS AMBITIONS, NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE?

This is contextualised and we would not wish to be prescriptive as local bodies would likely settle on different powers, over and above a core set of powers, which allow them to achieve their aims. Some areas expressed reluctance to take on more powers, instead suggesting that if communities gained more influence, input and representation into current local or national governance arrangements fewer further powers would be needed. For the most part though, communities currently feel disempowered, despite being asked to do more, and so were supportive of additional powers.

We would recommend a democratic toolbox of powers – some core powers but then beyond that not all communities will want all the powers available to them and may wish to negotiate sharing of powers with other localities, and with existing bodies to continue delivery in partnership where collaboration and economies of scale are the most appropriate solution. Communities would benefit from understanding what the options might look like in communities like theirs before deciding, for example some on Mull were particularly inspired by the example of the Danish island of Samsø and the powers exercised there for greater community control and responsibility. Some urban communities seek inspiration from cities like Bologna, Italy.

General power to act and raise funding

A new local body needs to have the power to act and raise the funding it needs to be able to follow through on the community's aims. This may be through a share of tax (whether national, council or future local income or land taxes). Current work on visitor levies or "tourism taxes" also provides a potential route for raising funds locally, particularly in tourist hotspots. Community benefits from local renewable schemes in rural areas are frequently administered by development trusts or community councils rather than local authorities and have become an important source of income in these places, so there is precedent for using these funds locally and potential for new bodies to negotiate with developers. We recognise that these funds are not evenly distributed across the country however and are not accessible to urban areas. Our work on democratic finance also suggests that these funds could be augmented with investment raised from local people via democratic finance products.

Some communities flagged up that whilst keen to have more of a say on spending, and more budget, they are wary of the responsibility that would come along with raising and administering significant funds. There is also concern that transferring budgets from local authorities leaves remaining local authority services underfunded in the current financial climate. Decentralising funding and raising funding at local government level is a live issue, with central government again seeking to impose council tax freezes as a response to the cost-of-living crisis. Article 9 of the European Charter of Local Self Government sets out the need for financial autonomy for local democratic bodies, and we are keen to see local bodies protected in this way.

Decision making power for functions

Groups had various suggestions for what functions they would wish to decide on, and differing opinions within themselves. From the discussion it was clear that some had big ambitions, beyond the suggested powers set out in the discussion document. Examples of powers discussed include planning, training and employability, enforcement and community policing, asset transfer, health and social care, roads/infrastructure and public transport, local economic development, tourism, parks and youth services. This is not a definitive list, and local processes would need to determine what was appropriate in each area. One area commented that currently community organisations operate in areas of system failure (state/market failure) and that any further powers need to be more than just filling those gaps but allow communities to take positive steps towards long-term sustainability and community prosperity.

Power to direct associated budgets

Communities were clear that they wished to direct funding to community priorities, which may include some services currently delivered by third sector. Stability of funding over multiple years was an important theme - both funding of local bodies and funding they may pay via procurement or grant to other partners for service delivery. There is a clear link to Community Wealth Building here e.g. the ability of local bodies to better deliver local procurement at scales accessible to third sector and local business. National procurement of contracts for example ferries, and even regional arrangements, such as public transport, sometimes do not deliver services that make sense at local levels. There is also an opportunity to consider how funding is allocated in a way that combines place based and thematic funds. For example, responding to the climate emergency is a cross cutting issue but contextualised to a particular place, requiring actions to reduce carbon emissions, whilst also considering community and infrastructure resilience – joining up funding streams and allowing local bodies to determine how to meet the climate challenge in place could improve local responses and better contribute to a national response.

Power to employ staff for admin/specialist roles

Communities recognised the importance of being able to employ staff for specific roles, rather than to rely on volunteers, who are overstretched as it is. Those development trusts who have staff highly value them, and it makes a huge difference to the community in terms of boosting capacity for community engagement. As well as development officers in trusts, community clerks in Shetland were another example given of a possible model. There is an opportunity to think about employability at a very local level and how communities can have more say in what staff they need and connect to local employability practice. There is an opportunity to reverse privatisation and outsourcing practices. Redistribution of public sector jobs across Scotland aligns with CWB principles and could support measures to address inequality of opportunity and depopulation for example.

Power to enter into collaborative arrangements to achieve economies of scale

Local democratic bodies can be thought of as part of an extended network, able to collaborate to achieve mutual aims, and on larger projects such as economic, physical and health infrastructure. This networking allows for sharing of skills, best practice and knowledge. Currently, these networks do not function leading to examples where decisions made as part of City/Region deals for example, feel increasingly remote from the people they affect, do not work for local communities and are out of reach of public scrutiny. Collaborative arrangements would need to deal with the complexity of multi-level governance and build in transparency and accountability at all levels.

In the absence of a written constitution (present in European near neighbours), it is important that if these powers and bodies are created, they are protected from centralisation by future national governments. Culture change can be a slow process and new forms of local governance will take time to bed in and need protection from the play out of national politics.

These bodies must not be party political or ideologically driven, so that elected officials act in the best interests of the community rather than the interests of the party.

2. A. SHOULD OTHER POWERS BE ADDED?

Local democracy intersects with debates around land reform, community right to buy, asset transfer and common good land, we would suggest that local bodies are able to own and manage land and assets for community benefit and have the power to determine community asset transfers to other suitable community bodies. It should be appropriate for them to have compulsory purchase powers for vacant and derelict land and buildings if it is in the community's interest to take on these assets, recognising the problem of absentee land or property owners, the blight on communities of abandoned buildings, and the issue of land banking blocking development.

B. ARE THERE SOME POWERS WHICH SHOULD BE RETAINED BY EXISTING DECISION-MAKERS?

Yes, if mutually agreed by localities and to support collaborative working. Or temporarily as part of a transitional process acknowledging that different communities have different capacities and will be able to move at different paces. It may be that some local bodies start with a few powers whilst they build capacity and structures and take on more powers over time.

3. WHEN THINKING ABOUT WHO MIGHT BE PART OF NEW DECISION MAKING BODIES, WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO ENSURE THEY TRULY REFLECT THEIR COMMUNITIES AND ENHANCE EQUALITY?

- DTAS recognises that there can be challenges around representation in some development trusts, as well as community and local councils. For example, many development trusts and community councils can lean towards white, older, and middle-class voices. In other communities, where representation is better, they can often feel like they aren't being heard by the public sector. It's essential that any new decision-making bodies, as well as existing ones take steps to address this and recognise barriers to participation for groups beyond those already well represented, whether that's the level of bureaucracy, jargon used, lack of time, or other needs not being met. Democratic processes do not always elect people with the right skills, aptitudes and characteristics. Often the opposite. We would advocate for ensuring party politics are not part of the process at local levels to build trust and hopefully attract people who are motivated by local issues. One member also suggested a community nominations process rather than self-selected individuals standing for election.
- There was concern from some groups that elections allow certain interest groups to take control, although the suggestion to counter that - for decision making posts to be voluntary is equally open to similar issues. Also worries from some quarters that not enough people would get involved in an election process – from the experience of community councils in some areas which struggle to recruit. It may be however that expanded powers may counter this issue over time.
- There was a suggestion to include standing representation for certain groups – e.g. businesses, young people, families, equalities groups or other interest groups to ensure representation of a wide variety of perspectives.
- There are mixed views in communities on using methods such as sortition, or citizen juries which select from the whole community and are representative of the make-up of the community to balance out elected officials. Whilst there is recognition that these methods bring balance to elected officials, the methods themselves are not widely understood, or agreed on. There are differing opinions in our network about whether, if used, this should be compulsory or voluntary. We would hope that in partnership with outreach work and education, that it could be the latter with good representation as a result. Some commented on the wasteful nature of jury service, which is not the most helpful model to emulate. A possible alternative suggested was open citizens assemblies led by expert facilitators where anyone can attend and vote (online or face to face).
- Outreach work with parts of the community who may have been historically less well represented is important with continuing support from national and local equalities organisations. There is learning from the experience of citizens/people's assemblies to date on best practice. There will need to be some form of affirmative action so it's not just the "usual" voices or the loudest voices represented in these bodies. There are some lessons here too for development trusts to think about how they can improve representation from their own communities.
- Education on this in schools is important so it's seen as part of citizenship and service to the community and links clearly to the Curriculum for Excellence Active Citizens theme. This could include school reps, potentially to represent the views of both children and parents. An example was given of 'skolval' in Sweden where students take part in mock elections to understand the process of local democracy. As well as education, students should be given time to get involved in local projects to build the habit of participation.

4.

A. THINKING ABOUT YOUR OWN COMMUNITY, WHAT GROUPS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE REPRESENTED THROUGH OTHER SELECTION METHODS?

Suggestions include:

- Schools and colleges/universities electing representatives. There's a strong desire in development trusts we engaged with to see more young people getting involved.
- Existing civic or third sector groups, housing associations, older people, minority ethnic communities, disabled people's organisations.
- People from all socio-economic backgrounds
- Parents and people with caring responsibilities
- Local business and industry.
- Climate action groups or groups working on sustainable development in the area.
- The perspective of future generations - there is learning from Wales' Future Generations Act which could be applied locally.
- The perspective of the more than human world and the rights of nature.

B. WHAT METHODS SHOULD THESE BE?

As in Q3 sortition/citizen juries – a mixture of views on sortition were expressed, some supportive, and including questions over whether it should be compulsory or optional, and whether people might be skilled enough to participate. It would need to be combined with increasing citizenship education and specific training for people selected through these methods. Suggestions also referenced in Q3 include standing representatives for certain key groups or interests alongside the more random nature of sortition. Or a system of open and accessible citizens assemblies (or digital equivalent), where anyone can attend and vote.

Any method would need to be fully accessible to disabled people, and minority ethnic groups (for example materials in multiple languages and in accessible formats, resourced interpreters, accessible venues).

5. A. WHAT WOULD THE ROLE OF LOCAL ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES BE?

This is a key question, and it will take time to decondition people from the role of spectator/consumer that sees low voter turnout and apathy about local decision making, to the role of engaged citizen with agency to effect change in their local area.

The main incentive therefore needs to be evidence of actual change for the better at a local level because of new decision-making powers. The current apathy is not the fault of individuals but is a result of disempowerment and disengagement as current processes seem to not result in the changes people would like to see, and a system which renders people too busy struggling to make ends meet and care for their families to have time to be as involved in their communities as they'd like. Creating a virtuous circle of good, accessible, decision-making processes and tangible change will strengthen the incentive to participate.

More practically:

- Compensating people fully for their time whether that's by way of a salary or other in-kind incentives (for example if a salary was problematic for ongoing benefits but it was important to increase diversity).
- Ensuring employers allow for time off as they do for jury service and if commitment is longer and sufficient salary is being paid by the decision-making body, ensuring employers hold jobs open for people's return and there is no detriment in the workplace.
- Providing access to free childcare or cover for other caring responsibilities.
- Skills training might mean it can be seen as useful work experience/skills development.
- Participation should be time bound so that people are clear that it's for a certain period and then they can hand over responsibilities.
- Wider contextual factors such as four day working weeks or UBI would take pressure off people's working weeks and enable working people to take more active part in their communities including decision making.
- New decision-making bodies being run by supportive, trained administrators/facilitators.

6. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE BEST WAYS TO ENSURE NEW DECISION-MAKING BODIES ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR COMMUNITY?

The scale at which the bodies operate should mean accountability is more built in – it overcomes the challenge of remoteness which is faced in many local authorities currently. For example in Glasgow, with a population of over 600,000 people, one ward can have a population of 20-30,000 people with a few councillors representing them, whereas in a more geographically spread out council area such as Argyll & Bute, the total population of the whole council area may only be just under 90,000, meaning there is better representation in terms of numbers of people per ward, but communities are dispersed over the islands, and peninsulas of the area and often at a distance from the main council hubs in the major settlements and there can be a sense of disconnection. Often the only opportunity to hold officials accountable is on election day. New bodies should be scaled to be approachable.

There is learning here from existing bodies which already (often imperfectly) represent the community to some extent e.g. development trusts, on how to ensure community accountability, and it's clear that being a board member of a trust in a small community is not always an easy ride, often due to that visibility. This more direct and participative form of democracy will have its challenges and support should be in place for those involved, to ensure that accountability is given and received in a positive and constructive way.

Communication of demonstrable impact will be important for these bodies rather than a focus on outcomes only.

Suggested principles:

- Transparency – some in our network were keen on the idea of community auditors of services and delivery against community priorities. Suggestion for live streaming of meetings.
- Visibility – with smaller scale organisations, elected members will be people you know, and you will know people who are involved via sortition.
- Communication - clear, accessible, frequent, two-way, multi-method – digitally, in person events and potentially community hubs where all information is available. Consideration of accessibility of materials and spaces (online or physical). The aim is to reach everyone, build awareness and increase understanding.
- Codes of conduct for officials and anyone participating – draw from the experience of the third sector.
- Regularly seeking feedback – through formal and informal means, ensuring diverse groups get the opportunity to feedback and it's not just those that shout the loudest, or can lobby the most effectively.

7. ARE COMMUNITY EVENTS A GOOD WAY TO INVOLVE LOCAL PEOPLE IN SCRUTINISING PROGRESS AND SETTING FUTURE DIRECTION?

This is likely for each community to determine, but potentially yes – building community around food, celebrations, and existing events could provide an opportunity to feed into processes of deliberation and scrutiny. This builds in visibility of decision makers, grows engagement, celebrates progress and those that contributed, and increases accountability.

There is good practice to share from communities who have successfully used these as part of a process of creating a CAP or LPP for example.

Groups highlighted that these events will not be universally accessible though, so need to be balanced with engaging with people in their own settings or ensuring accessible alternative opportunities for those who could not or would not attend such an event.

8. WHAT OTHER MECHANISMS WOULD HELP ACHIEVE HIGH LEVELS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES?

Some suggestions:

- Consideration of digital democracy, drawing on international examples (Taiwan is a particularly interesting example of digitising and opening up democracy on a national scale). There are different views on using digital tools – a lot of trusts use social media to communicate and build up awareness of activities and opportunities to get involved and there is potential for a new local body to use digital platforms like social media or other platforms (e.g. Citizen Space – currently used by SG and LAs amongst others). This improves visibility and overcomes some accessibility challenges but should be used alongside more “human” interactions. The experience of community on social media is not always a positive one and there are pitfalls.
- Building trust in the process - that there will be follow through, that people won't be playing the system for their own agendas, an absence of party politics and that standards are maintained. Openness about complexities/difficulties if decisions/progress taking longer than expected. These will be essential to rebuilding trust and overcoming the disillusionment currently felt.
- Co-design rather than consultation. Building consensus rather than polarising. There are plenty of methodologies available on how to do this, and learning from within Scotland, the UK and further afield so communities do not have to reinvent the wheel but need a toolbox of methods and adequate training and support to implement them.
- Joined-up working – working towards a vision of public services and third sector activities complementing and adding value to each other, to better serve the community.

- Principle of experimentation and imagination – communities are not going to necessarily get it right at first and the same methods won't work everywhere – be open to trial new methods and learn from others internationally – generational programme of learning about participative/deliberative democracy and methods.
- Build on participatory budgeting to allow communities to suggest their own projects or bring forward propositions developed by the local decision-making body which the community can examine and vote on at events or as part of elections.
- Consideration of the role and influence of major landowners (and the historical power structures), particularly in rural areas, and the outsize influence they can still exercise. While this can be positive in some cases, it can also be to the detriment of the interests of the majority of the community. Local bodies would need a way to ensure they were not captured by such interests and could effectively counter them for example through compulsory purchase powers. In urban settings, these influences may be different, it could be a major employer for example, but the power dynamics will need to be surfaced and communities supported to work on these issues together.

9. WHAT ELSE SHOULD THIS PROCESS INCLUDE TO PROVIDE NEW COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING BODIES WITH A STRONG LOCALLY AGREED MANDATE?

In considering appropriate boundaries, the process should be cognisant of historic and existing formal and informal boundaries, for example of development trusts (which often mirror community council boundaries or council wards). There was a suggestion that parish boundaries are still helpful and recognisable, and another that high school catchment areas are a helpful scale, but these would need to be negotiated. Some advocated for going to an even more granular level of neighbourhoods within a ward.

In rural areas, particular communities have distinct local or geographical identities, but also deep connections, via key infrastructure (such as roads or ferries) or services to other communities which need to be considered in the round.

There are significant differences for a local community being situated within part of a city, rather than geographically more distinct, and complex interlinkages between different tiers of decision-making/governance and services delivery. How should a local democratic system be built to honour subsidiarity, whilst also remaining/strengthening connections with these different tiers? This is much more apparent in a city context but applies across the board.

These are conversations needed at an early stage and the suggestion of an early citizens assembly to discuss and initiate a new local body is helpful.

Community Action Plans are an established and effective mechanism to develop proposals from the grassroots about what communities wish to happen in their locality and are a good example of deliberative and participative democracy in action. There is much good practice here to draw on. More recently Local Place Plans have taken this process a step further and aligned to council development plans, and there is generally support for some form of local action plan to set out community priorities once a boundary has been agreed. However it's clear from some of the communities consulted, that not everyone is aware of the existence of these plans so effective and determined community engagement is key.

10. ARE THERE WAYS TO ENSURE NEW BODIES ARE STILL WANTED – FOR EXAMPLE BY MAKING THEM TIME-BOUND AND SUBJECT TO RENEWAL BALLOTS?

One measure of ensuring that new bodies are still wanted would be to consider the levels of engagement or satisfaction over time. Bodies should seek regular feedback, although communities will want to decide for themselves on how this is done. If there are elections locally and the turnout drops below a certain threshold this could trigger a renewal ballot.

There is a desire for this to be an experimental process, and an acknowledgement that things may have to start small and build up towards a functioning local democratic structure – this will take time and look different across different parts of the country so having renewal ballots too early may not allow sufficient time for the cultural change required. Some in our sessions described it as a generational project of change, which would suggest that whilst in some areas, changes can be adopted quickly, in other areas initial engagement may be low but will build over time with education built into the school system, and community engagement gradually increasing levels of awareness and participation in communities.

11. HOW DO YOU THINK COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING BODIES SHOULD BE RESOURCED?

Shifting to a more localised and participatory democracy, alongside community wealth building suggests that if power is decentralised then budgets need to be decentralised too. Part of the budget should be reserved for resourcing the decision-making body itself – ensuring that there is adequate administrative support, record keeping and monitoring functions, and compensating people who are filling roles at the expense of other employment. Many groups cautioned against an over reliance on volunteers and noted the large voluntary workloads often experienced by those involved in development trusts or community councils. There is a concern over people's capacity - communities are already stretched as evidenced by the experience of development trusts struggling for people on boards, volunteers, and struggling for resources. A reliance on volunteering skews participation towards wealthier or older participants. This links to the evolving nature of work and volunteering and a national Volunteering Action Plan which aims to create a society where more people can volunteer throughout their lives. There should also be a commitment to building local skills rather than funding consultants. There are many factors at play here beyond the remit of this consultation, but with a major impact on the outcome.

Arguments have been made, based on international examples, for more local control of council tax, and a proportion of national income tax as part of a move to decentralise power and budgets from the SG. Locally, it may also be appropriate to raise funds from a visitor levy or "tourism tax". This is part of a much bigger picture of reform of local taxation and considering appropriate taxes on land and wealth/assets as well as income.

Some groups felt particularly disillusioned with local authorities and suggest funding comes direct from SG to local bodies and bypasses councils completely. This can be read within a setting of current dysfunctional relationships between community groups and councils, with community groups often on the receiving end of cuts, or insecure funding, and suggests structural and relational change is needed. Some communities feel that they are competing with councils for scarce resources.

As mentioned in Q1, community benefits from renewables have played a major role in funding the activities of some communities who have neighbouring wind farms for example and have given them consistent resources with which to employ staff and take forward major projects. Growth in renewables to meet the challenge of net zero means potential for more resources to be captured and shared. Consideration should be given to the remoteness of urban communities, and some rural communities from these projects and resources, perhaps through contributing a proportion of these funds to some kind of national community wealth fund with a formula for distribution that levelled the playing fields, particularly for communities experiencing deprivation. Developers are currently keener to work with community bodies or organisations like Foundation Scotland than public bodies as they see funds directly reach communities.

These funds could be augmented with investment raised from local people via democratic finance products. These are particularly useful for economic development purposes. This type of investment embeds local ownership and accountability in addition to circulating money within communities.

12. ARE THE STANDARDS SET OUT IN THE FUTURE SCENARIO BOX THE RIGHT SET OF STANDARDS TO PROVIDE REASSURANCE THAT NEW COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING BODIES WILL BE EFFECTIVE AND TREAT EVERYONE WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT?

Clear standards which are adhered to will build confidence and trust in local bodies. Communities will need to see evidence of this. We have already referred to democratic legitimacy several times, as well as accessibility, adopting a process of creative experimentation with clear attention to impact, so these standards seem appropriate. Building in an equalities and human rights approach from the start is essential to ensure these bodies are inclusive and represent the full diversity of their communities.

Groups felt that there was learning from a comparison with current standards expected of OSCR regulated charitable community bodies, with clear duties for trustees, and a code of conduct. There should be an accessible complaints process for when things go wrong.

13. HOW COULD A CHARTER BE DESIGNED TO BEST ENSURE A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKERS AND THEIR PARTNERS IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE WIDER PUBLIC SECTOR?

A charter design process would need to be highly collaborative to ensure all partners felt able to sign up to it. There should be clarity on relationships, responsibilities, and a shared commitment to desired impacts, perhaps aligned to the National Performance Framework or Sustainable Development Goals.

Some areas have recently devised and adopted collaborative Community Wealth Building charters between public sector partners so there may be learning from those. Earlier suggestions of a process of local citizens assemblies to initiate a new local body, could perhaps be extended to develop the initial charter.

Charters would establish the basis for the local decision-making body and give it some insulation from changes in national or local government to ensure consistency regardless of whether the political winds blow one way or another.

14. A. WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT MIGHT COMMUNITIES NEED?

DTAS recognises that community capacity is variable and often fragile and some communities in wealthier areas may have more capacity to take on resources and responsibility more quickly, so the amount and type of resource and capacity building support will be different in different places to ensure equity. Some suggestions:

- Communities may need support to audit skills in a community to establish what skills are already out there and can be harnessed for local democracy.
- Communities will need staff who are trained in processes of deliberative democracy, community engagement and holding each other to account, conflict management, non-violent communication etc. Elected officials will need to be trained in this too. Staff will need to cover the main tasks of administration, building a knowledge base, managing grants and contracts, financial management. Staff could also train the community in active citizenship and participatory democracy, support the process of community action planning, as well as direct delivery of services where appropriate. DTAS has seen, through funding programmes such as the SG Strengthening Communities Programme, the impact of having a dedicated staff member on community capacity and engagement and would be happy to provide more on this to help consider the role of paid staff as proposals are developed further.
- Some members wanted to highlight the experience of boards making hard decisions in the community. Those involved as elected officials and staff may need support to develop the skills and resilience to deal with backlash in the community, as well as helping citizens and communities find more constructive ways of giving feedback.
- Existing public bodies who have specialist knowledge in terms of administration and service delivery can support and mentor communities.
- Support for active citizenship. Enhance and expand what is delivered in schools. Could there be potential for a new qualification in citizenship and local democracy?
- Leverage the power of existing networks like DTAS, SCA, SCDC to support communities in this process. Enable staff and elected officials to network across Scotland and beyond, particularly with those countries who have established small scale democratic structures and support them to explore international models of local government to fuel experimentation – the community learning exchange is a good model, but with expanded boundaries to support the international learning.
- If there are a few areas which pioneer this change, then creating democracy mentors to support the adoption in other areas might be helpful.
- Communities may need support to consider questions of equality, inclusion and accessibility. For example, how to overcome accessibility challenges – whether public transport, accessibility of language used in documents and at meetings, caring responsibilities, format of meetings to allow all sections of the community to be involved.

14. B. WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT MIGHT COMMUNITIES NEED?

Empowered local democracies mean councils could be dealing with less day-to-day service delivery issues and perhaps playing a higher level, coordinating role, as enablers. This may free up more strategically focused councils to take on more powers from the Scottish Government, and to act regionally, for example across City/Regional Growth deal areas (as they have begun to do in Regional Economic Forums) where collaboration is needed at sub-national scale.

If you remove party politics from a local democratic area and make it more citizen and issue focused, it calls into question the dominance of party politics at council level. Instead, each local democratic area could send representatives to the council to be their voice in decision making on those issues reserved to the council. There could potentially be more decentralisation and devolution of powers and responsibilities by other public sector bodies around health and social care for example to make them more accountable to their local communities.

Our members highlighted a need for the public sector, especially councils, to trust communities and the third sector more and not see them as competition for scarce resources. This should be based on the understanding that often the reason we have charities is that for some reason the system (state, market etc) is failing, and people have a need that is not being met by any other means. Or charities are intervening at the point of prevention and trying to initiate system change themselves. Communities with the opportunity to say what they need might identify something that's currently delivered by a charity or social enterprise, just as much as by a public sector body and a shift to a community development approach would support that and encourage more joined up working between public and third sector services.

Groups suggested that the Scottish Government needs to trust councils and communities, and not bypass councils but agree clear duties which are securely funded. There should be subsidiarity across the board, not just a hollowing out of the council role and funding.

15. ARE THERE SPECIFIC ADDITIONAL POWERS AND RESOURCES WHICH WOULD HELP PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANISATIONS TO WORK EFFECTIVELY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NEW COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING BODIES?

Training for public sector organisations in how to support the process of deliberative local democracy and facilitate a model of networking and collaboration across multiple localities will be essential. Collective Leadership Scotland's work may be a model here. Training public sector and community sector leaders together would be an opportunity to build joint working alongside skills, build networks and make some of those culture shifts.

An example might be the kind of culture change that North Ayrshire Council and its public sector partners went through - a paradigm shift - with whole organisation training on Community Wealth Building in the council to be able to integrate and deliver a CWB approach. Embedding local democracy will be a similar paradigm shift so will need to be well supported to make sure that the local decision-making systems created work, build on what's there already, and existing bodies and systems change too. The aim, to create a decentralised system or network that integrates the work of a wide variety of public sector organisations which currently work at a national or regional level. This may feel messy and uncomfortable at first transitioning from a traditional hierarchy to a more networked, collaborative model and will take time.

Councils are often very risk averse in their decision-making, for example around procurement or planning. They need support and facilitation to examine the attitude to risk if having to work with a wider variety of partners whilst devolving funding and decision-making to local communities. There will inevitably be mistakes and bad decisions as communities get used to new powers, but building a culture of experimentation and leaving room for growth without shutting down the opportunities for this by being too risk averse will be important.

**16. THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING THESE QUESTIONS.
PLEASE ALSO TELL US ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE YOU THINK
IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO KNOW AT THIS STAGE.**

The kind of changes this consultation discusses require imagination and are a big shift from the current model of representative democracy, where people are individual consumers of services delivered by local authorities and other public bodies. It's taken decades from the good intentions of devolution rippling out from the Scottish Parliament at its formation in the latter part of the last century, to the centralised Scotland we have now, and could take decades, significant resource, and a rebuilding of trust to transition to something else. Whilst we advocate for more participative and deliberative democracy delivered at local, community scale, we are also realists about the readiness of communities (and the wider public sector) for this and the need for groundwork introducing community decision making prior to rolling it out.

In some ways it's not the ideal time to be doing something like this when trust in the public sector is quite low, we're in a time (again) of deep budget cuts, a running costs crisis and the constant challenge to engage communities and find volunteers to keep current community organisations going. It's certainly an uphill battle to overcome scepticism and disillusionment and there have been challenges for our members to engage with this consultation process because of those issues, and to hold the kind of conversations required when every volunteer or staff hour is vital towards keeping organisations going.

To pace the change, if not pilots then we would at least advocate for some early adopters to go first and give the rest of the country some tangible idea of what this might look like in reality. There are going to be some places where it's less of a giant leap than others, and there is already much more local discussion and practice – for example, in our network, the members who hosted facilitated conversations such as Mull or Carluke. It's important to acknowledge that there will be a different pace of change in different communities.

Unless the changes described in this consultation are part of a wider transformation of democracy in Scotland to a more deliberative, less top down and centralised approach across the whole public sector, including local authorities and the Scottish Government and its agencies, it will feel like tokenism, and tinkering around the edges. It also needs to dovetail with work on economic democracy and decentralisation through Community Wealth Building, wellbeing economy, sustainability, climate resilience, human rights, advocating for the rights of more than human species, habitats and landscapes and land reform. Each question opens up a new set of questions – what does this process say about potential changes to local taxation for example. It must be a part of wider system change.

There is a lot of good practice out there internationally, and standards such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government which still applies to Scotland as part of a member of the Council of Europe which we can draw on and build on, so at no point are we reinventing the wheel. We can also build on what's already there in our communities – existing community infrastructure and anchor organisations such as development trusts can provide a foundation where they exist and are healthy. But there's a challenge to our own development trust/community org sector to consider how representative they are of their own communities, and their own processes of selecting decision makers and involving communities. This is an area for further research, by DTAS and others, into existing practices of community decision making in Scotland to evaluate and build upwards from.