

Edinburgh Partnership Consultation:

Neighbourhood Partnerships and Locality Committees

The proposed future changes for Edinburgh Partnership governance will mean that Community Councils are likely to have little meaningful participation in the following areas: community planning, the specific Locality Improvement Plan workstreams of employability, Health and Social Care, safer communities, children and young people and the implementing of decisions in local 'Place' issues.

Community Councils currently have equal voting rights with all other members of NPs (elected members and public sector bodies). Concerns have been raised that with the review proposals of NPs Community Councils are slowly being removed from community planning structures and will in effect be excluded from participating in decision-making around service provision and financial spend if NPs are to no longer continue.

Even though NPs are still meeting during the review period, they have gone from being functional groups to merely discussion groups and are experiencing a long and drawn-out slow death by the creation of Locality Committees (LCs) and the transfer of decisions being remitted to the LCs. One example of this is in the South East Locality: Council Officers have been appointed to Ward level to help with gathering grant applications and then passing back to committee for signing off – here the LC has done away with the main community function of the NPs.

It is hard to see how local voices can input into meaningful decision-making in the area they live in. Currently it is a top-down approach with a Locality Management Board with teams that co-ordinate local partnership working.

We acknowledge that the LCs are not 'in scope' of this review as they are Council Committees, but we feel that they still have an active role to play in community planning. We have been advised that Community Councils or community groups cannot sit on these committees at present, and that this means that our voices in decisions affecting the locality are now limited to bringing deputations to committee with no input during debate in committee. We are reduced to giving a speech and answering a few questions and then leaving the committee to arrive at its decisions. We have no place to ask questions on our communities' behalf to help decide on various things that affect our local areas.

We need local input to help resolve local issues and local problems – and from a committee ruling on local issues that few of the public has ever heard of.

Local significance

Community Councils will continue regardless of what governance structure is put in place through this review of the Edinburgh Partnership, but here in Tollcross, as in many parts of the city, community groups are worried that those who live in these areas are having decisions made on their behalf with little place themselves to input or affect these decisions. Unfortunately, the four Locality Committees across the city do not include local residents or local community groups in the decision-making process in committee they are consulted and then the committee make a choice on their behalf. This is not true participation in local decisions and democracy – it is merely process with local groups having no say on the outcome.

To put it simply community bodies should continue to have representation in the new governance of Localities; Community Councils have a statutory responsibility to represent our local communities in the same way that other organisations represent their users, such as tenant groups, Parent Councils and others such as BME groups that are currently not well represented across the localities.

If local decisions are removed from local involvement, then the social cohesion that the Council desires, and which communities demand will continue to fragment and more of the places we live in will become more disparate and less socially and communally connected. There will be no meaningful way in which local communities can engage with decision-making.

As Community Councils, we will be left taking on the concerns of local people without any means of taking forward these concerns. Although we entirely understand the move to partnership working on locality level, we are concerned that the voices of our communities will be left out. A solution to this is needed if we are to continue in partnership with Council.

Moving forward

It is unclear what the governance arrangements that we are being consulted on will be finalised or how they will relate to LCs in the community planning framework. Since we do not know what the decision-making relationship and accountability will be, it is difficult to express a preference on the proposed Locality Partnerships (LPs) shown in the diagram.

It could be that sub-groups be convened below the level of the LCs or LPs, with local groups involved in the planning and implementation of decisions. This would feed back into the main LC/LP, who would still be the decision-makers but would not be overwhelmed by sheer numbers wanting to have their voices heard at the full LCs, which is the case now with several wards and the elected members of each coming to bear on proceedings on the committee.

In order to promote better partnership working, the new arrangements would have to ensure that there was local voices and influence in partnership with all sectors: NHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and voluntary groups.

The concern here is such arrangements are not articulated in the consultation and that as a result the implementation of any new model would mean that connections at the local level to LC's would mean these vital connections are lost.

A group or groups convened that gave space to local issues being discussed across the different communities across the locality would be much more useful and effective for monitoring issues and reporting back to LPs, and with direct access to resources could be enabled to make direct changes quickly.

I believe that this group could work going forward and if it were properly engaged locally and met locally and went out and about to see issues then it could be very effective in achieving direct local change and making improvements for all.

Reducing the number of city-wide oversight groups and dropping this to true local decision making will bring about real, meaningful social and environmental changes for the places across the city that we call local, that we call home. We all want to see changes for the future made that are effective, long term and make us proud to call our local area home.

Andrew Brough, **Chair of Tollcross Community Council**