

Strengthening Community Councils

Exploring how community councils can
contribute to democratic renewal in Scotland.

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Purpose of the Event



- To reflect on the research finding and to discuss them with colleagues here today from community councils, civic society, public sector, academia etc.
- To think about how we'll use the recommendations and research in the future.
- Photos
- Twitter #StrengtheningCCs and #CelebrateCCs
- Introductions

the big picture: a global democratic recession?



Democratic Recession

- The last 10 years there have seen a **reduction in the number of democratic systems**, and established democracies are under increasing pressure due to social, political, environmental and economic factors (Wike & Fetterolf, 2018)
- **The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2016 >>**
 - global average score fell with 72 countries dropping in the ranking compared to 2015, and just 38 moving up
 - number of “full democracies” dropped from 20 to 19 (USA now classed as “flawed”)
 - around half the world's population (49.3%) live in a democracy of some kind. But only 4.5% of people live in a “full democracy” - half as many as in 2015
- Democratic principles enjoy broad support, but current practices and institutions provoke cynicism > **people love the idea of democracy, but despair at how it is practiced**
- Global Attitudes Survey shows increased indifference, frustration and **authoritarian attitudes particularly in the youngest populations** of democratic systems around the world (Foa & Mounk, 2016)

Participation in local decision-making in Scotland: deficits and aspirations

(Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2015 + Ipsos Mori 2014)



35% of Scottish citizens said they feel part of how decisions affecting their community are made



77% said would get more involved in their community if it was easier to participate in decisions that affect it



80% said that people should be involved in deciding how money is spent on local services



96% said that people should be involved in making decisions about how local services are planned and run

Policy and research context for public participation and democratic innovation



- Local Governance Review (> *Local Democracy Bill?*)
- Places, people and planning – Position Statement 2017
- Re-launch of the National Standards for Community Engagement (2016)
- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Participatory Budgeting national programme (2014-2019)
- COSLA Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014)
- Parliamentary Local Government Committee (2013, 2014)
- National Planning Framework 3
- Christie Commission on Future Delivery of Public Services 2011
- Community Councils Short-Life Working Group (2011)
- Audits and reviews of Community Planning (2011, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018)

2014 COSLA Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy



- “50 years of **centralisation** has not tackled the biggest problems that Scotland faces
- For a country with Scotland’s wealth and strength, the level of **inequality** is intolerable, and has huge social and financial costs
- There is a link between the **absence of strong local democracy** and the prevalence of inequalities
- It is **communities** that **empower governments** at all levels, not governments that empower people”

Background to our research



Democracy Matters

Community empowerment

Democratic renewal

Building on what's there



Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY



Methods

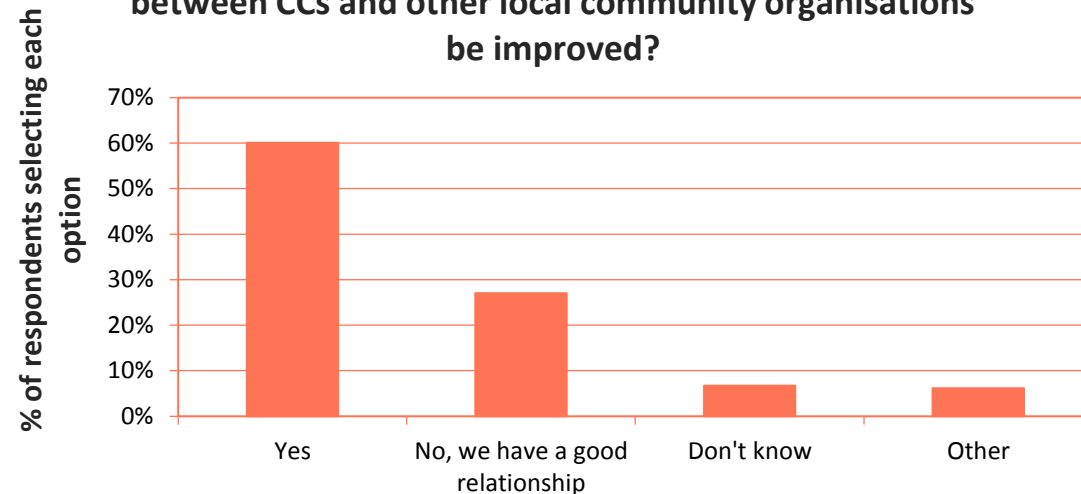
- Self-funded research by What Works Scotland and Scottish Community Development Centre
- Research Reference group (RRG)
- Literature review
- 5 regional workshops
- Online survey with 600+ responses (mainly community councillors)



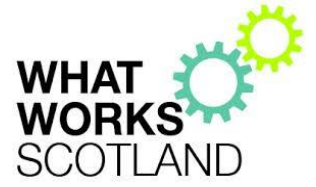
Findings - Participation

- CCs are involved in a myriad of aspects of community life
- Challenges around recruitment, competitive elections and diversity
- Calls for better promotion
- Relationship with other community organisations

Chart 4: Based on your experience, could the relationship between CCs and other local community organisations be improved?



Example – Dennistoun CC

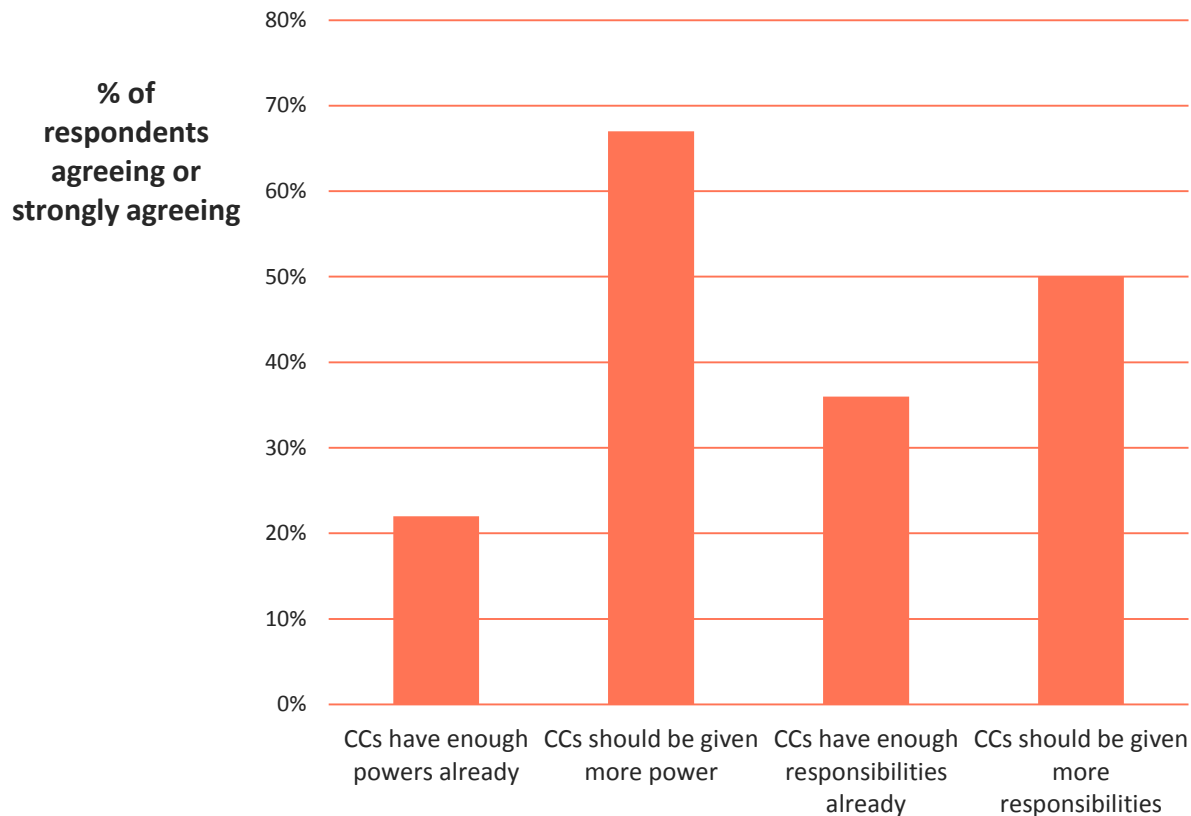


Engagement with the wider community, as well as other community councils, housing associations, the Local Area Partnership and other third sector organisations and professional structures.

“Dennistoun Community Council has established strong relationships with our community. Councillors attend meetings out in the community such as those held by Associate Members and other community groups which builds a good network of community relationships.” (Member of DCC)

Findings - Power and influence

Chart 8: Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements



Which powers?

- Stronger representation in decision making structures
- Being consulted earlier in the planning system
- Spending powers
- Role of elected members
- Oversight and accountability

Example – Money for Moray



The Joint Community Councils of Moray (JCC) set up, then helped to run, the community-led participatory budgeting (PB) initiative, Money for Moray.

The project has organised five voting events that have enabled people in Moray to decide how to allocate £275,000 of funding to local projects

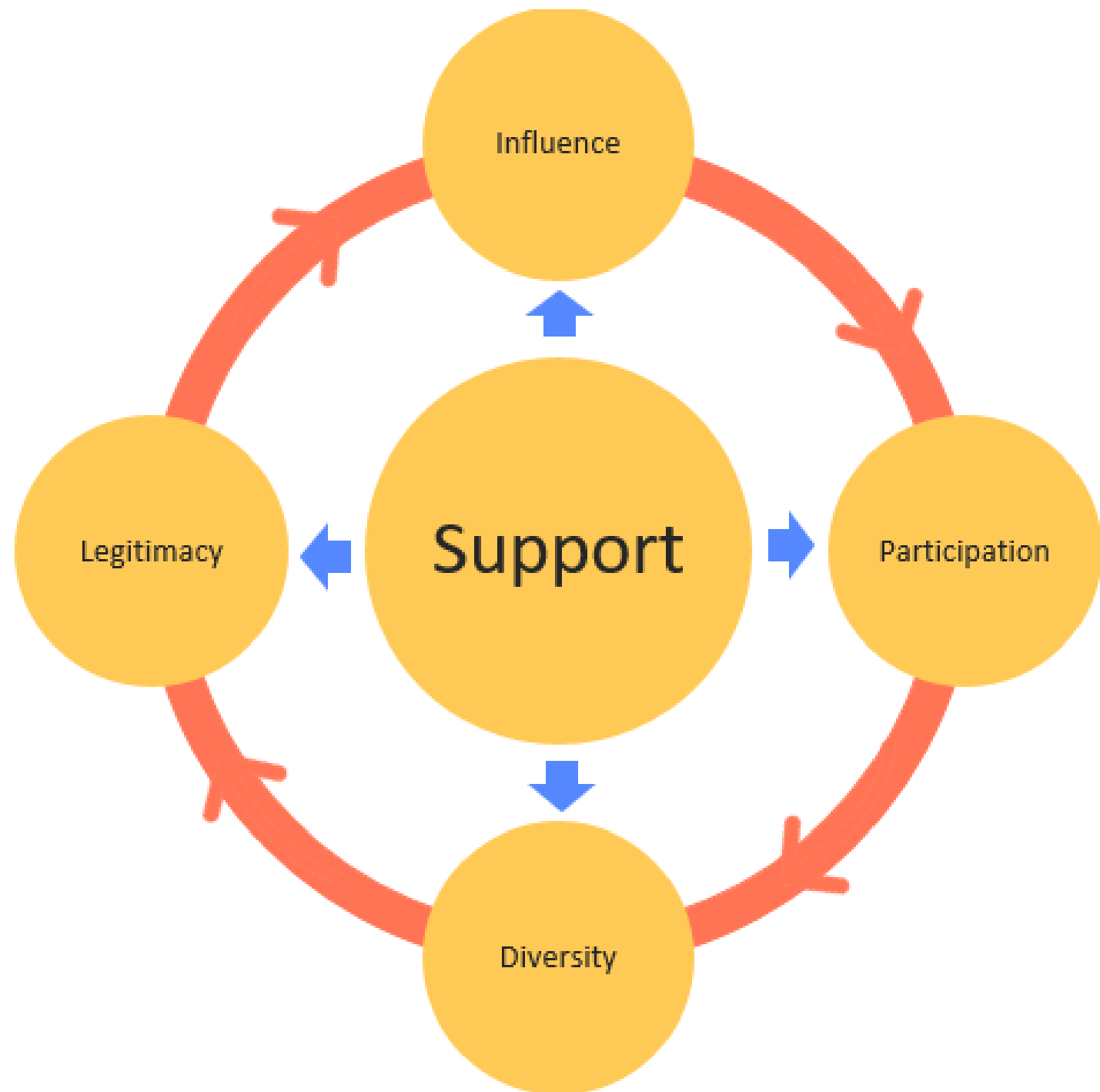
M4M say this has “generated more interest in the work of Community Councils and has increased membership in some”. Also “helps the credibility of Community Councils with agencies”

Findings - Support

- Information
- Training and capacity building in a range of areas
- Resources
- Association

Example – Midlothian's Federation of CCs

- Consists of representatives from the 16 community councils in Midlothian.
- Meets to address issues of shared concern.
- Provides a collective voice when engaging with agencies.
- Has representatives on community planning groups to ensure information is shared and community councils have a voice in local decision-making structures.



Key recommendations



The **Local Governance Review** should consider strengthening CCs to improve local democracy.

CCs should be given more power and resources **at same time** as supported to better represent local diversity.

Required **support** includes training, capacity building, CC associations and compensation schemes to address barriers to participation.

Options for **making CC membership more representative of local diversity** should be considered.

The Scottish Government should conduct a **publicity campaign** around CCs

Reforms should be **flexible** and take account of local need.

Discussion Panel



- Angus Hardie (Leith Links Community Council and Scottish Community Alliance)
- Lauren Bennie (Dennistoun Community Council)
- Hayley Bennet (University of Edinburgh)

- Facilitated by Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh, What Works Scotland)

Reactions/reflections

What do you make of the findings from this review of CCs?

Take 20 minutes to discuss and please agree on two points to be shared in plenary

Keynote listeners



- Nick Bland (Scottish Government)
- Lynn Sharp (Improvement Service)
- Kristoffer Boesen (Improvement Service)
- Lorraine Gillies (Scottish Community Safety Network)
- Evelyn O'Donnell (Glasgow City Council)
- Hayley Barnett (COSLA)

What should happen next?

Discuss for 20 minutes

Possible considerations....

- What are the opportunities within context of democratic renewal (e.g. Local Governance Review)
- What can we do to take the recommendations forward?
- What else can be done?

Thank you



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Remember to tweet #StrengtheningCCs and #CelebratingCCs

Event held in partnership with the Scottish Government and the Improvement Service.

