



8 December 2023

City of Edinburgh Council (CEC)

Edinburgh Community Council Scheme and Boundary Review 2023 – Phase 1

Tabled Response to Consultation Questionnaire; directed to CEC Governance

From: Ken Robertson; Secretary, Edinburgh Association of Community Councils

This text stands as an expression of opinion drawn from those community councillors (ten) participating in the Members' Board of Edinburgh Association of Community Councils. It is intended as a basis for discussion among community councils over the full course of the Scheme and Boundary Review. It is not a statement made on their collective behalf and it is not an expression of individual community council views on the questions posed in the Scheme Review. All community councils have been strongly encouraged to respond to the consultation directly, in their own name.

Scheme Review Questionnaire

Introduction:

Q1. Your Details:

Q2. How are you responding?

Secretary of EACC, on behalf of the EACC Members' Board.

Name of the organisation:

Edinburgh Association of Community Councils: see end of consultation and 'Any other Feedback'.

Q3. How involved are you with your CC?

Member

Q4. Effectiveness of Community Councils

| To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about your local community council? | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|
| My community council engages effectively on matters that are important to our local community. <small>Please select only one item</small> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Disagree |
| My community council fairly represents the views of my local community. <small>Please select only one item</small> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Neither |
| My community council encourages people in my neighbourhood to participate in community council meetings and activities. <small>Please select only one item</small> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Agree |

Q5. How often should Community Council elections be held?

Less than every four years.

Q6. More information on frequency of elections:

6.1 There should be a maximum three-year cycle. Community councils' visibility, relevance and the partnership roles they play, alongside the local authority and the Edinburgh Partnership framework, all need to be kept active and current. One way to do that is to ensure more frequent elections.

6.2 We are now entering year five of the current term (from 2019). You will find almost all community councils reporting an increasing fall-away in active participation by elected members (the core grouping of a community council), as well as by nominated members. In broader terms, in many cases quoracy of community council meetings is threatened or absent. We have seen some community councils falter. Member departures are not easily replaced, even with the facility of co-option.

6.3 There are a number of factors behind the slide in participation. There is the element of 'natural depletion' as elected and nominated members move out of the area. There is discernible, widespread engagement 'fatigue' or 'withdrawal'. In the pressured, heightened anxiety, post-Covid years, personal perspectives and priorities of city residents have shifted, we suggest. There are bigger things to worry about.

6.4 In a narrower, more focused context, there is also marked disenchantment on the part of members with CEC's past record of 'community engagement' and with CEC's ability or willingness to deliver 'positive outcomes' against considered and tabled requests of community councils. This disenchantment is most notable in the context of 'hard', high-visibility, 'place' issues relating to neighbourhood planning issues, local development planning, roads, transport and infrastructure, and community services. This disenchantment is current.

6.5 'Lack of funding' (Scottish Government grant and other) is acknowledged by community councils as a very real difficulty. But constant repetition dulls the message. Repeated complaints of 'getting nowhere' with the Council on community issues held to be of real local significance are a steady feature. Disenchantment and departures grow in tandem.

6.6 To stem the depletion, the community council election cycle should reduce to three years. Coupled with much more active projection, by both CEC and Elected Councillors in particular, of the core 'local democracy' role to be played by community councils (and view this as an adjunct to the relaunched Scottish Government *Democracy Matters* endeavour), a shorter election cycle gives a natural opportunity to refresh community councils' image and to replenish enthusiasm. A well-publicised election gives is the opportunity to break into general public and community 'unawareness', apathy or disinterest.

6.7 A live 'local democracy' needs a three-year community council cycle. Local democracy is to sit at the heart of *Democracy Matters*, after all. It's held to be of national significance. It is to be championed. There is every reason to press the Scottish Government for stronger community council support. There is no good reason why national elections should interrupt or impede a three-year cycle.

Q7. Should the co-option process remain as is, or should elections be held for every position?

Blank

Q8. Other comments on co-option:

Add comments on no change in co-option process versus elections for every position:

7.1 The co-option process (see CEC Scheme for Community Councils 2019 – the '2019 Scheme Rules' - Sections 6.23 to 6.26) should not remain as is. The process should be made more flexible. Elections do not need to be held for every community council position where there is an evident dearth of willing participants.

Add comments on co-option:

8.1 More needs to be done to bolster community council activity, across a wider span of community interests. Given a dearth of elected members, the co-option facility to fill elected member vacancies should be used as actively as is needed.

8.2 The central objective of a community council is 'to bridge the gap between local authorities and communities, and help make public bodies aware of the opinions and needs of the communities they represent' (*Model Scheme Documents 2023*; The Improvement Service / Scottish Community Councils.)

8.3 Commensurate with transparency and accountability, approved co-option of individuals to a community council (with voting rights) is an essential support and safeguard to its ability to do its job. Co-opted members can add experience, knowledge, skills and contacts frequently lacking in the elected members themselves, notably in local and development planning, licensing, roads and transport, health and social welfare (Locality Improvement Plans), web technology and communications. Co-option by interview is a flexible acquisition of core resource. Requiring every seat on a community council to be an elected one would be adding a completely unnecessary impediment to the successful conduct of community council business.

8.4 Of course, an associate representative can bring also bring in new competencies, but the appointment will not carry a voting entitlement. That is more akin to bringing in a contractor for a short-term fix. A vote brings 'skin in the game', the incentive to commit effort for a perceived influence on community reward. Any medium-term commitment of such effort should carry the voting entitlement. That points to co-option as a preferred alternative.

8.5 The 2019 Scheme Rules should be amended to make co-option more flexible, to encourage the willing participation of competent, committed individuals to their community council. This is expedient. We would propose:

In the first instance, see **Appendix 1** at the end of this consultation response, in relation to Sections 6.13.1 and 6.13.3 of the 2019 Scheme Rules, where we feel there has been some drafting confusion.

Thereafter, consider some changes. In relation to the maximum number of elected members, cut the minimum requirement for community council 'viability' from one-half to one-third. Look to adopt a structure shaped by the following pointers:

- 6.13.3. Reduce the 'minimum' bar in respect of 'elected' candidates from 'below half' to 'below one-third of the maximum permitted elected membership'. Set a minimum of five elected representatives. (So, with a maximum of 16 elected members and 8 representative members, a minimum of 5 elected members could allow the community council to be formed.)

- *One might consider* the following adjustment: In the ordinary course of business, if the number of 'elected members' stands below the number of 'nominated members', the number of nominated member votes will fall to a par with the number of elected members. The Chair or senior office bearer present will carry a casting vote.
- 6.24. Amend to read: '...number of community council elected members falling below one-third of the maximum permitted elected membership...'
- 6.26. Amend to read: 'If the number of co-opted members is to exceed one-half of the maximum permitted elected membership, approval must be granted by the City of Edinburgh Council.' (So, from the example above, the community council could carry 5 elected members out of a maximum complement of 16, 8 nominated members and up to 8 co-opted members. *One might consider* capping the number of co-opted member votes along the lines described above – not ideal, but better to keep the show on the road.)

8.6 There will be concerns that heightened scope to co-opt participants who carry a vote raises the risk of a Chair 'packing' the community council vote overall for her or his own agenda. That is recognised, but it isn't as though community councils have a surfeit of choice. Thus:

- 5.6, 6.23 and 6.25: As a backstop or 'safeguard', introduce a Scheme clause to call for the position of 'associate representatives' and 'co-opted members' to be 'reaffirmed' at each community council AGM. Do away with the 'need' for an EGM as a means of 'electing' people to a vacancy. Use the AGM to effect any 'election'. Recognise the more frequent exercise of community 'choice' within a shorter 3-year election cycle.

Q9. Should the maximum number allowed on community councils be increased?

No.

Q10. Would you support increasing co-option numbers to assist community councils with low membership?

Yes

Q11. What more can be done to help community council membership better reflect the diversity of individual communities?

Add comments on community council member numbers:

9.1 Work first and foremost to encourage full and lasting take-up of existing elected and nominated member slots. A vibrant grouping of 20 – 24 individuals is big enough for any 'council', big enough to give meaning and purpose to the 'handling' and 'management' of local community issues as they arise (via active sub-groups and brought-in associate representative 'advisers').

9.2 If a community council 'area' 'needs' more than 24 individuals to guide its expression of 'local democracy, then the area is too large. Reduce the boundary size.

Add comments on co-option numbers:

See 8.1 *et seq.*

Add comments on community council diversity:

11.1 Don't look to 'manufacture' diversity of membership. The starting-point is to promote diverse community council *inclusion and participation* as widespread front-runners to potentially more diverse *membership* down the line. There should be tailored messages to recognised ethnic groups, in particular to Asian groups. (See Scotland's Census 2022; [Ethnicity | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk)) The objective is to highlight the relevance and importance of all of the many different voices which can make up the neighbourhood and community.

11.2 The objective is *not* that a community council should be a mirror to the diverse make-up of a community, in *all* its social detail and protected characteristics. The objective is *not* to construct artificially a membership platform. Rather the targeted outcome should be that a properly-supported and properly-directed community council (directed from without by its endowed authorities and from within by competent members) should be declared and seen to stand as a listening post for all residents. ('It needs to be built, before they will come'.)

11.3 The Scottish Government mandates the existence of community councils. Local Authorities have statutory oversight. Edinburgh community councils are essentially 'wards' of CEC. Both the Scottish Government and CEC share a responsibility to promote the concept and project the potential of community councils. So, there is a need for active, purposeful, CEC engagement and support, to deliver the message that community councils are there to serve wide communities and that they do bring to the local community diverse demonstrable results.

11.4 Let's begin by having CEC and Elected Councillors regularly use mainstream media* to publish community council 'support' articles. Elected Councillors of an ethnic background setting have an especial opportunity here to 'push the story'. Extracts from published support can be 'sampled' or repeated many times thereafter by community councils.

(*perhaps *The Scotsman*, certainly the *Evening News*, the *Edinburgh Reporter*, local community magazines like *C&B News* and *Trinity Spotlight* and the online *Scottish Beacon*.)

11.5 Despatched CEC mail (e.g., council tax, garden waste collection permits) could carry short 'prompts' on 'your community council', in the form of inserts (A6) or bookmarks. CEC's mainstream webpages could carry simple but prominent headlines or straplines or other 'statements of support' for community councils. There is no sign of that at the moment.

(See [Home – The City of Edinburgh Council](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk) and [Meetings, agendas, minutes - Modern Council \(edinburgh.gov.uk\)](https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk))

11.6 It's beyond the ability of most community councils individual to mount substantive ongoing content for public distribution. Those with access to community magazines have a head's start. However, the important step is to begin with a citywide promotion of how community councils are meant to serve and what they can achieve. '*Get people talking positively about their community council. Paint it in a better light.*'

11.7 In parallel, work to get Neighbourhood Networks (NNs) and Locality Improvement Plans (LIPs) 'on the road'. NNs are in themselves a broad church hosting diverse groups and diverse 'focused, active agendas'. NNs are at the core of the Edinburgh Partnership's work to deliver its Partnership Vision and its priority workstreams. NNs are larger and naturally more diverse than individual community councils; NNs in their composition are naturally home to a wider array of 'single- issue' associations.

11.8 Community councils need to be part of the NN framework. In so doing, they stand to broaden their own diversity of collaborative interest and participation without the threat of becoming driven by diverse interest groups. As standalone bodies, with their own line to CEC, they need to balance a drive for wider appeal and open discourse with the avoidance of internal dispute over a multiplicity of 'social imperative' agendas. Put more simply: *'Paint the picture of the community council as the community's measured voice to the council, but not the council's mouthpiece to the community.'*

Q12. Should there be a limit to how many times a person can be elected to an office bearer position?

No.

Q13. More information on re-election:

13.1 A time limit on length of office bearer service is not a luxury affordable to most community councils. They are lucky to have repeat offers of service. Let local democracy take its course, with a quiet word if need be. If an office bearer is emerging as carelessly inefficient, wildly ineffective, disputatious or generally 'out of order' then an EGM resolution or AGM 're-election' is to hand.

13.2 CEC would do well under the 2019 Scheme Rules, Section 10.4, to take periodic informal soundings from community council office bearers on how their community council is faring. (We are not aware that something like that has been done in the past – if that is the case, it's unfortunate.) A 'change in membership' can be healthy, but 'new membership' has to have the same endeavour and competence, or better.

13.3 Since the question isn't being asked, this is an appropriate point at which to pause to consider what 'makes' a good community council. What are the characteristics you as CEC Officials, we as community council members, would see as separating a good community council from a struggling one?

13.4 When it goes well:

Local recognition of the community council as voice that is 'listened to' by the Council, not just 'heard'.
Local acknowledgement that the community council can 'achieve things', 'help make things happen'.
Local support across the community mix and good participation in consequence.
CEC understanding that the majority of community councillors see their own voluntary participation (as elected or representative members) as an undertaking, not a hobby; as a commitment, not a pastime.

13.5 When it doesn't go so well:

Ambitions to stand as a well-organised, well-marshalled, well-resourced, usefully-networked, credible conduit to CEC (first and foremost), to the Scottish Government and to other public sector bodies – all the hallmarks of a community grouping that can lead in its mandated role; first they fade, then falter, then lapse.

13.6 'Things just don't happen'. Progress with CEC can be 'glacial'. Community councillors can 'feel totally let down by the whole process'. The work becomes seen as unproductive, fruitless, unrewarding, tiresome, exasperating and consequently unappealing.

13.7 EACC conducted a wide survey of Edinburgh community councils in June 2023. (**Appendix 2** to this consultation response.) Copies of the report were passed in mid-August to CEC's Michele Mulvaney (Strategy Manager), Gavin King (Head of Governance) and Andrew Field (Head of Community Empowerment). The report showed a community council structure under strain. Only a small minority of respondents reported close to full complement in member attendance.

13.8 Willingness to act was reported to be strongest in the 'hard' areas of Planning; Roads, Footpaths and Mobility; and Traffic and Public Transport. But in overall terms, the capacity to act was much more constrained. Equally, these are the areas into which community councils look to put much of their effort but where the deepest frustrations are felt, when they feel that they are not listened to, or are overlooked and by-passed or effectively 'dismissed' by 'expert' opinion within CEC, or indeed are returned to square one by an empty council purse.

Q14. Feedback on the current boundaries of community councils:

14.1 The opportunity has to be taken in this Scheme Review to calibrate a community council structure that will properly accommodate (via boundary size by resident numbers, funding, other resource) development at Gilmerton Inch and right around the western perimeter of the city, Balerno to Queensferry & District.

14.2 At the same time, the opportunity has to be taken to correct for an obvious skew in community council boundary sizes by resident number.

14.3 From the 2011 Census city population numbers used as an adjunct to the 2019 Scheme Review, we see five community councils (Leith Central, Corstorphine, Gilmerton Inch, New Town Broughton, Merchiston) carrying population densities of 18k to 25k, well above the average community council ward size of 10.4k and median size of 9.5k (in 2011). We also see examples where wards of similar population size show some quite sharp differences in community councillor complements (elected plus nominated).

14.4 A population of c. 20,000 is akin to a sizeable Borders town. A 'part-time', volunteer community council group, 'working evenings', tasked essentially to 'shadow' the Town Council, but structured as at present in terms of member numbers per resident population count, has a real job on its hands. In an Edinburgh setting, it is compromised, almost at the outset, in its administrative ability quickly to react to and take on widespread community issues, and in its capacity to engage with CEC and community planning partners.

14.5 The difficulties are compounded where a community council finds itself drawn into big 'changing face of the city' issues, (large scale housing and related development, regeneration, energy transition) with all the spin-off implications. Development planning, roads, transportation and services infrastructure are 'hard' issues which local communities have to face up to and may seek to face down. Community councils are 'conduits' for the signals (and consultations) that accompany big change. They ought to have an effective platform from which to play their part.

14.6 'Edinburgh needs a bigger city.' Tackle growth and change by ensuring community councils stay compact and focused. Expand their number to reduce resident 'head-count' at the top-end of the community council size distribution. Bring proper scale back into play by reducing the size of the high-field outliers in the current structure. Communities with a diversity of values, interests and hopes have stronger definitional importance than physical (20-minute) neighbourhoods. Establish more community councils to reflect the difference.

14.7 There are instances where community council boundary lines sit across Elected Councillor wards. A community council then moves from four to eight or even twelve Elected Councillor relationships. We understand that, in practice, this structure tends more to dilute the links, in terms of diligent attention paid by the Elected Councillor to the community council, than to strengthen them. The community

council may be spoiled for choice. It's easier for eight Elected Councillors to 'go on rotation' or to 'drop the ball' than for four. The recommendation is to tighten the overall focus by aligning community council boundaries within electoral wards.

Q15. Add other feedback in relation to community councils or their boundaries:

See closing 'Other comments or suggestions about this engagement process'.

Q16 & Q17 'About you'. Respondent's personal detail

Q18 Feedback about this engagement process

Strongly disagree - Agree – Agree

Q19 Provide other comments or suggestions about this engagement process.

[A] Preface:

The comments added throughout this consultation response convey expressions of personal opinion drawn from those community councillors (ten) participating in the Members' Board of Edinburgh Association of Community Councils.

The comments are not intended as a statement made on the collective behalf of community councils in Edinburgh nor are they an expression of individual community council views on the questions posed in the Scheme and Boundary Review. All community councils have been strongly encouraged to respond to the consultation directly, in their own name.

[B] The effectiveness of community councils:

4.1 Right at the outset of the consultation, the three-part query on community council 'effectiveness' identifies the single most important issue, then casually skates past it. There is no invitation at this point to offer 'more information' or 'other comments' on 'effectiveness'. At no subsequent point in the consultation questionnaire is the central issue of effectiveness addressed explicitly, with the opportunity given to offer focused comments or feedback. The closing invitation to offer 'other comments or suggestions...about this engagement process' doesn't do the job.

4.2 This is a big opportunity that has been by-passed, perhaps by design. What on earth are we to make of that?

4.3 Our reading is that the majority of community councils in the city are compromised by lack of effective member participation, lack of hands-on resource with which to project their story and lack of reach into their community (by way of impactful communication and correspondence with local residents). The majority of community councils consequently lack meaningful relevance to the majority of constituents.

4.4 We have no doubt about community councils' desire to 'engage effectively', but their ability to do so is presently sharply constrained. Their engagement generally is not as strong as it should be for the core community representation role they are mandated to play.

4.5 'Fair representation' hinges first and foremost on wide community reach and response. Some community councils achieve those goals. We would say that most do not.

4.6 We believe there is a genuine desire to encourage member and community participation. But, outside of ‘big issue’ or ‘hot’ topics which can galvanise parts of a community, it is evident hard-going.

[C] Other feedback in relation to community councils or their boundaries:

15.1 This consultation is a soft one; it chooses to skirt some basic issues. It doesn’t do what it needs to do. Consider the consultation’s overview – the phrasing which sets the ambition for the exercise – and its objective. “As the city’s population increases, we need to review the scheme to make sure that our Community Councils are the right size to fairly represent our new and growing neighbourhoods.”

15.2 See the opening remarks in 4.1 above. This declared objective is fundamentally inadequate. The real objective should be “...to make sure that our Community Councils have the *right capabilities to represent effectively and fairly* our new and growing neighbourhoods’.

15.3 As matters stand, you’ll find they don’t. As matters stand, given the first opportunity in five years, the consultation evades the real stress points faced by the community council structure in the city. It doesn’t ask how the structure could and should be reinforced then improved, in a time of weak community participation, general engagement withdrawal, and functional strain.

15.4 Perhaps CEC will look to cover this ground in consultation Phases 2 and 3. But the time to ask is now. It is well-enough recognised within CEC and among Elected Councillors that community councils are ‘struggling’. The EACC survey referred to (13.6 above and Appendix 2) added important colour. The challenges were conveyed again to CEC Officials at the Scheme Review pre-consultation sessions. This questionnaire could have very usefully pursued what was said then, but it ducks the opportunity.

15.5 Two years ago, the Edinburgh Partnership identified a number of ‘actions’ to improve collaborative relationships between community councils and community planning partners, in particular the relationship with CEC. (**Appendix 3** to this consultation response.) The Community Engagement and Empowerment (CE&E) Team is a welcome outcome, although it is in its early stages. We see it as pivotal in re-setting the relationship. A related medium-term action was to ‘review support arrangements for community councils’. The time for these support arrangements is now, ahead of the next election round.

15.6 One avenue of approach is for community councils *and* CEC to petition the Scottish Government for stronger financial support for the capital city, placing that call in the context of the fresh *Democracy Matters* consultation programme, as well as the rapidly changing face of an expanding city.

15.7 We would repeat: the Scottish Government mandates the existence of community councils. Local Authorities have statutory oversight. Edinburgh community councils are wards CEC. CEC has some duty of care. However, “*Despite the unique demands of a Capital city, Edinburgh continues to receive the worst grant funding of any local authority in Scotland.*” (Cllr. Day, Feb 2023)

15.8 We recognise the prospects of a financial grant increase are slim. However, the request should be made. Local democracy does indeed matter; yet ‘the most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland’ is finding it an uphill struggle, hard going. (The assessments and frustrations expressed in this consultation response are more than ‘Edinburgh issues’, by the way. You will find similar sentiment spread across many Scottish community councils, documented, for example, in recent webinars by The Improvement Service, among others.)

15.9 Here is the big-picture setting in which this CEC 2023 Scheme Review takes place: [Community Councils at 50 – the forgotten front-line of democracy? – SPICe Spotlight | Solas air SPICe \(spice-spotlight.scot\)](#)

15.10 Here are some **proposals** to help this CEC 2023 Scheme Review move to break an *impasse* and to give community councils new support:

15.11 Declare that a slice of prospective Visitor Levy proceeds will be committed to new funds to local communities and community groups. Make the promise now of improved direct financial support for community councils, the ‘groups of people who care about their community and want to make their area a better place to live’. ([Community Councils – The City of Edinburgh Council](#))

15.12 Work with the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (EACC) on community council ‘promotion’. Get more content on CEC – community council ‘partnership’ onto mainstream CEC websites and mailings. Have the members of CEC’s Corporate Leadership team affirm their belief in and commitment to a strong community council platform for ‘local democracy’. Have this support offered through mainstream media (press articles) and other media channels, from the start of the year, as the Scheme Review takes shape, and well in advance of the next election round.

15.13 Work with EACC to have Elected Councillors (across the spectrum) commit similar support in the context of their own fields of interest. Build a ‘library’ of short media clips for distribution.

15.14 Give every support (including staffing) to the Community Engagement & Empowerment function. Ensure it is responsive to every incoming call; ensure it ‘logs and responds’.

15.15 Plan now for the reinstatement of core training / awareness programmes (in-house or third-party) for community councillors (and others) on neighbourhood planning issues, development planning and NPF4 / 5, licensing, traffic and transport, health and social welfare, and Locality Improvement Plans. (Call all of this ‘Civics’. Point to how the city works. Make it a feature.)

15.16 Come up with ideas on how CEC can help community councils in basic functionality. Minutes need to be taken; records kept. Websites need to be paid for, maintained, upgraded. Screen meeting facilities can be accessed for free, but strong functionality comes with licence fees. Equipment and consumables are expense items.

15.17 The following is prompted by **Appendix 3** (Section 3.3). Every community council needs a good ‘secretariat’ function. Most would gain from having support along the lines of meeting recording and transcription. Could CEC set up a ‘Secretariat Desk’ through which community councils could subscribe collectively, at a discount, to such a service? Could this extend to discounted access to Microsoft *Teams* / Office 365 facilities (sub-compartmentalised from the mainstream CEC facility)? Could community councils access discounted ‘office equipment’ supply, such as printer inks or replacement laptops, through CEC? Could this Secretariat Desk offer simple guidance on ‘technical queries’ and point to third-parties who could help on reasonable terms?

15.18 All of this might appear as cost-saving ‘at the margin’. But time and money saved in getting basic things running smoothly is time and money available for spend elsewhere.

15.19 Ensure the EACC has the conceptual, financial and operational support to ensure its partnership role with CEC as a bridge to all community councils.

15.20 This has been a lengthy contribution to the Consultation; deliberately so because the nature of the strained community council framework in the city needs to be highlighted. Similar strains are apparent elsewhere in the country. Yet we sit at a point where the Scottish Government is keen to rebuild purposefully the concept of effective 'local democracy' through its *Democracy Matters* conversations. We should not let that opportunity slip. To that end, EACC declares here its real desire to work closely with CEC to look to reinvigorate what has become, in general, a lacklustre community council framework. The baseline to acknowledge is that it needs CEC help to achieve that objective.

**Appendices 1 to 3 relate to the response offered to Q19.
'other comments or suggestions about this engagement process.'**

/ Appendix 1:

The City of Edinburgh Council Scheme for Community Councils 2019

Comments on the current wording.

1.1. Line 2: Amend to read '...Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, creating the current system...'.

3.8b. Line 4: 'relevant elected members' should read 'relevant Elected Councillors', so as to distinguish from 'elected and nominated representatives' who are members of the community council. (See 5.1.)

6.13.1 and 6.13.3. appear to be at odds on the number of 'candidates' for election.

6.13.1. Reference is to a 'number of candidates' 'more than half' of the 'maximum permitted elected membership'. An example would be more than 8 candidates for a maximum 16 permitted elected member places in a total maximum membership of 24. Here candidates are declared elected. Here a community council is established.

6.13.3. Reference is to a 'number of candidates' 'below half' of the 'total maximum permitted membership'. An example would be less than 12 candidates for a maximum 16 permitted elected member places in a total maximum membership of 24; here no community council is established.

Therefore: 6.13.3. Line 1: Amend to read: '... maximum permitted elected membership...'.

6.23. Line 1: Delete 'either'.

For the 2023 Scheme, consider:

6.13.3. Reduce the 'minimum' bar in respect of 'elected' candidates from 'below half' to 'below one-third of the maximum permitted elected membership'

/ Appendix 2

1] EACC conducted a wide survey of Edinburgh community councils in June 2023. A copy of the report was passed in mid-August to CEC's Michele Mulvaney (Strategy Manager), Gavin King (Head of Governance) and Andrew Field (Head of Community Empowerment). The report showed a community council structure under significant strain. Only a small minority of respondent groups were close to full complement in member attendance.

2] Capacity and willingness to act (focus, in effect) was felt to be strongest in the ‘hard’ areas of Planning; Roads, Footpaths and Mobility; and Traffic and Public Transport. At the same time, these areas into which community councils put much of their effort are the areas where the deepest frustrations* are felt; they arise when community councils feel they are not listened to, are by-passed or are effectively ‘dismissed’ by ‘expert’ opinion within CEC, or they are met by an empty council purse.

3] Recap on some of the expressed opinion in the EACC survey:

Status ‘adequate but not secure’;

‘Motivation not high due to amount of work and the lack of success in “making a difference”’;

‘Difficult to get community councillors to take on some roles’;

‘Decline in numbers and capacity to pick up on local issues’;

‘Very real fear we will not have many candidates for election next year’;

‘Struggle to recruit is a key issue’;

‘Capability will be significantly diminished in Q4 2023 without effort to replenish members and skills / expertise’.

4] Consider something pointed:

‘If community councils are perceived as mere talking shops who command little respect from public authorities, they will remain unattractive and steadily decay towards irrelevance’.

5] Or something sharper and more recent, this in the context of perceived past CEC obduracy and subsequent inaction on a local roads issue:

‘We are totally fed up and very badly served’ (Colinton Community Council, C&B News, November 2023).

‘We are regularly consulted about numerous things as community councillors and we have very little to show as outcomes for these consultations.’ (Queensferry & District Community Council, October 2023)

6] (There is a general acknowledgement of a ‘consultation overload’ which most community councils can’t accommodate and which leaves them feeling that CEC ‘boxes’ have been ‘ticked’ and ‘due process done’ while they struggle to keep up.)

7] And getting to the heart of the matter; it’s argued by some that community council effort committed is futile if change can’t be delivered:

‘What advice would you give us when you’re saying there’s no resource and there’s no funding?’

(Queensferry & District Community Council, October 2023)

(*The assessments and frustrations expressed here are ‘national issues’, by the way, spread across many Scottish CCs and documented in recent webinars hosted by the Improvement Service and West Lothian Joint Forum of Community Councils.)

/ Appendix 3:

The Edinburgh Partnership:

Collaborative working with Edinburgh Association of Community Councils (c. Dec 2021)

3.3 Immediate way of working – communications

Information flow – actions to improve the information posted on the Edinburgh Partnership website, provision of structural diagrams and glossary of terms on community planning arrangements in the city and activity to raise awareness of community planning.

Access to Council and Contacts – Council key contact list to be produced and maintained and contacts for community council chairs to be kept up to date.

Communication and dialogue – Measures to strengthen senior management participation in EACC meetings, improvements to information sharing based on community councils identifying their areas of interest, briefing on community councils and community planning to be produced for Council officers.

Medium term actions - structures

Community council elections – to hold the next community council election in 2024 and to review the approach to marketing elections to identify improvements.

Community council boundaries – to carry out a review of community council boundaries in 2023.

Council support for neighbourhood networks and locality community planning partnerships – implementation of the Council Place review to establish a Community Empowerment Team.

Support for community councils – review support arrangements for community councils, explore options for increasing information on Council business, develop a mechanism for information sharing within communities to support collaborative working, carry out a training needs analysis to inform a potential development programme for community councils.

Maximise local information and capacity building – mapping of local networks to identify potential efficiencies and opportunities for sharing knowledge.

- 3.4 A significant issue for the EACC was the need for resources to develop the capacity and facilitate the engagement in representing community councils in strategic processes. Currently in line with statutory requirements, revenue support is provided direct to community councils by the City of Edinburgh based on a set amount per head of population in their area, with additional uplifts for accommodation costs where relevant. As a non-statutory body funding is not provided to the EACC although they provide a co-ordinating function and are members of the Edinburgh Partnership Board.
- 3.5 The Edinburgh Partnership until 2018/19 allocated an annual amount of £500 to the EACC to support its costs in participating in the Board. With subsequent budget decisions allocations to support the participation of the community of place (EACC) and community of interest (Edinburgh Equality and Rights Network) members ceased.
- 3.6 Significant discussion has taken place at the bilateral meetings on this issue. From an EACC perspective funding is required to:
 - facilitate communication with all community councils in partnership activity
 - strengthen the role of community councils
 - support their independent status of community councils
 - Provision for an independent executive resource is considered essential, to ensure community council representation and advocacy in policy fora.