

**sedc**

scottish  
community  
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centre

# Supporting Communities Learning Exchange

**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> Decemeber  
2023**

## Background and context

This session was held online and provided an opportunity for groups and agencies involved in SCDC's Supporting Communities Programme (along with other interested partners) to come together and share learning and experiences.

The focus of the session was on the local 'planscape' including Community Action Planning and the development of Local Place Plans (LPPs) in particular. Participants heard presentations from Mick Doyle (SCDC) on the Local 'Planscape' and Nick Wright on Local Place Plans. This was followed by group discussion focusing on 3 key questions:

- What are people's experiences of local planning and the wider 'planscape' they fit within?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for local communities around local planning and LPPs?
- What support needs to be provided for local communities to fully participate in local planning?

## Experiences of local planning

People's experiences were generally of long-term planning but short-term funding - making it more difficult to keep sustained involvement at local level. Also, we need to recognise that communities are at very different stages and levels of readiness to contribute to, participate in, or take the lead in local planning processes – "this is brand new for some folk". Participants had different experiences of how plans originated – some took the lead themselves while others had plans 'gifted' (imposed) on them as part of other processes such as Locality Planning.

It was recognised that there were a number of factors that influence how people engage – these include wealth, social class, and connection to community. There are communities where people feel alienated from participating in planning processes (for the future) because they are more concerned with the present – because they can't get enough to eat or they're living in damp, poor quality housing.

## Challenges and opportunities

The main challenges and opportunities identified by participants were:

**Language and understanding** – there is a need to talk about planning in much more straightforward language as well as helping people to understand the different planning processes that exist. This would help communities to understand better where community-led action plans fit in the ‘messy local planscape’ – “Where do our community-led plans fit in with the overall scheme of things?” There was a general view that locally-led planning needs to be flexible and responsive to local circumstances – “it’s important to have hybrid community-led plans e.g. CAPs and LPPs”.

**Inclusion and engagement** – there was general reflection that we need to ensure that the less-heard voices are heard in planning processes. This isn’t just a challenge for Councils but also for community organisations developing their own plans – “important to check back with local folk after each engagement phase”. There was a clear concern that some parts of our communities are not thriving but merely surviving and are therefore much less likely to be involved or care about what is being planned in their community – “the people we really need to hear from may not be able to engage because they are dealing with day to day survival”. There was reflection of a fairly high degree of apathy in relation to community involvement based on many people’s previous experiences of engagements in local planning.

**Power and influence** – there is a need for better understanding of the scope of any particular plan and what that can achieve. There was particular interest in whether or how LPPs might help communities to have more influence in the planning system – “How do LPPs increase influence for local people?” – and whether they provide some new opportunities – “LPPS offer different but very new connections e.g. with Planning, but how do Council departments get used to working in new ways?” This is about communities having real influence whilst also recognising the challenges of this and not over-promising what can be achieved.

### **Managing, accessing and sharing data**

There was some concern raised about how communities access useful data to inform their plans and whether different organisations are able to share data with others. There was also a question about what we do when data is limited or no data exists. This is particularly important when gathering the views of people who are furthest away from decision-making

or who do not fit with more traditional models of 'place' e.g. travelling community, refugees/ asylum seekers/homeless people.

**Implementation of plans** – this was a recurring theme throughout the discussion as it can be difficult to move from creating the plan to putting it into action. Funding is a big issue but participants were pragmatic about this – “can funding be broken down into smaller chunks but still with deliverable timelines?”, “need to involve public sector officers at key points in the process – not to dilute community aspirations but to sense-check and make plans realistic”. We need to move away from piecemeal funding – a 5-year plan needs 5-year funding to avoid groups having to continually scabble about for money and thereby struggling to evidence real change.

## What kind of support is needed

### Engaging and involving people

- Supporting communities to 'get to the starting line'
- Support is useful to help with consultation and engagement
- Equalities – well-resourced people can be loud – how do we hear the quieter voices in our communities?

### Creating the plan

- Support is needed to create the plan and to review what has been achieved
- Help to link to data that exists and how to connect it with locally-derived data such as surveys, focus groups, etc.
- Support to develop plans which are realistic/feasible for communities

### Building support and developing relationships

- Need for support to liaise with service providers but also to involve agencies at different levels – local, regional and national

### Discrete support

- Funding for creating (and implementing) local action plans is important
- Many participants reflected the importance of having specific, skilled support available through a local community worker or similar
- Neutral facilitation support was also seen as being important

## Shared Learning

- Sharing different examples of LPPs is useful, to demonstrate what's possible
- Being able to share good practice through learning visits or exchanges

“It's good for folk to be able to learn from each other about how to do the plans and how to implement them – thinking through some of that from the beginning.”

