

# Community Participation Action Learning: A Summary

Between February and May 2018, the Improvement Service (IS) and Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) carried out an action learning programme with Community Planning Partnerships (CPP's) across Scotland. The aim of the programme was to enable CPPs to share their experiences in relation to meaningful engagement and participation of communities in community planning processes. The programme supported CPPs to collectively develop insights based on these experiences, reflect on their shared learning and take actions to improve practice at a local level.

## Summary of Key Messages

### 1. Information and Knowledge

CPPs are collecting data and intelligence across their systems to identify priorities and allocate resources, however, there is less evidence of dedicated mechanisms to facilitate analysis and shared learning about community participation within and across CPPs.

There is a need to more consistently share and use data across partners within CPPs. CPPs may benefit from placing a greater value on information and knowledge generated through community engagement and participation activities. CPPs felt there is a need to better co-ordinate the community consultations and engagement that are undertaken in order to generate learning on multiple topics.

### 2. Building and Developing Relationships

CPPs identified that many of the successes for partnerships are down to the working relationships that exist, both at a Board/thematic level, but importantly when working with people and communities.

There is a sense amongst some CPPs that 'community participation' is something they still 'do to' communities, and there may be benefits in CPPs exploring how they can help to facilitate and empower communities so they can participate and engage on their own terms.

### 3. Communication and Engagement

Clear communication / language and open and honest engagement with communities was viewed as important in bringing people and communities 'on board' and encouraging them to participate. However, there is no 'one size fits all' approach, and CPP's know that they must adapt accordingly, and learn from each other.

There is a need for multi-agency planning around communication and engagement strategy, and CPP's articulated a need to adopt 'a common language' in their work to engage communities and encourage participation. In particular, there is an important role for communication in both promoting the benefits of community participation, and in developing trust and meaningful relationships that enable communities to play a more equal part in local decision making.





## 4. Engagement Methods

CPP's shared a wide range of engagement methods and approaches which offer a wealth of learning to other partnerships. There was broad agreement across the sessions that there is not one single method or process of developing community participation, and officers must be free to take risks in order to adapt to the needs of the community. For many, hearing from other CPP's reassured them that they were 'on the right track' in terms how they were approaching engagement in their area.

CPPs recognise that they need to ensure that everyone has equal access to participation opportunities and provide a variety of ways that enable them to participate. This impacts on how, and at what level people choose to engage and participate.

## 5. Changing and Sharing Power

The strongest message to emerge from our research was about the role that strategic leadership can play in empowering staff to enable them to develop relationships and make decisions with the community and developing trust between agencies and people.

CPPs told us, it's not just about how they engage with people and communities but also recognising the part that local community members and volunteers play in terms of being able to provide additional capacity, expertise, and local leadership to address issues and priorities.

CPPs told us that there needs to be a political and strategic cultural shift (around sharing of power) that trusts and empowers people and communities to do more for themselves. This would emphasise the role of CPPs in enabling and facilitating, not only communities, but also officers in being able to make decisions that would allow this culture change to develop.

## What's Next?

There are key strengths to build on from the programme that would facilitate the improvement of community participation by CPPs. We have developed a number of recommendations that build on these strengths:

- Development/co-production of a resource on community participation for CPPs which builds on both learning from the programme and wider continuous learning.
- Continued networking amongst CPPs with an explicit focus on improving community participation.
- Continued opportunities for action learning amongst CPPs on community participation.

Findings and the complete analysis and recommendations can be found in the full report.

*IS and SCDC would like to thank all participating CPP's for their involvement in the programme.*

