

# Public Participation

Alistair Stoddart from The Democratic Society presented various ways Community Councils could use public participation to help them represent a full cross-section of the community and encourage the involvement of people in the decisions that affect their local area.

Alistair suggested that there is a 'Democratic Energy' in Scotland which is encouraging politicians to maximise the opportunities for residents to participate in decisions that impact on them. He suggested that Community Councils could help increase their reach and engagement with more local people in order to empower them and enable them to decide what is best for their local communities.

He identified a number of benefits of public participation including: encouraging innovation and collaboration in the local community; providing Glasgow City Council with ideas to improve their own engagement; reaching more residents, especially those who are easily ignored; increasing the visibility and impact of Community Councils; and most importantly, allowing people to have a say over the future of their community.

Alistair recommended that before embarking on any participation exercises Community Councils should think about the following questions:

- *Why are you carrying out the participation exercise?*
- *What impact will people's participation have?*
- *Who do you need to involve?*
- *What local context do you need to consider?*

For example if a Community Council wanted to run a public participation exercise around the closure of a local hospital they would need to consider the purpose of the participation:

- Will the public input have an impact on the decision, or has the decision already been made, is the hospital definitely closing?
- Will participation have impact on how a certain policy is implemented, perhaps what hospital services stay in the area and what hospital services are moved elsewhere?
- Are there any particular members of the community who may be hard to reach?
- Are there any particular members of the community who have a specific interest in the outcome of the participation process?
- Has a similar participation processes happened before in the area and what was the public feedback from that process?
- Are their local partners and organisations that could help with the participation process?

Alistair also encouraged Community Councils to grow Community Networks to ensure as many people as possible can participate in decision making exercises.

Community Networks could be built via mapping out all the different organisations and activities in the area, or hosting Community Network Building events.

These events involve the community gathering to learn about what is going on in the area and finding common ground. The information gathered at these events could help with future participation exercises.

The events can be a fun social event such as a pub quiz, a community cinema screening, Gala Days, live music, or a local trade fair, where people can find out more about services and businesses in the area.

Alistair also highlighted a number of participation methods that could be used by Community Councils to address the issues raised in the morning. These methods included:

**1. Deliberative Workshops:**                      ***recycling***

These are events where the community comes together to discuss a certain issue and seek solutions, ideas and preferences.

Deliberative Workshops are more than just post-it notes and flip charts, they are about working through issues together and co-creating shared solutions together. The workshops should focus on collaboration rather than arguments.

This method could be used to get the community together to discuss changes to services and to come up with improvements they would like to see. For example a deliberative workshop could be held where the community highlight issues and solutions to improve the ***local refuse service and increase recycling*** in the area.

**2. Pop-Up Democracy:**                              ***lack of youth activities***

Put simply, pop up democracy is the process of going to people where people are in the community and getting them to participate in decisions.

Pop-up democracy can take different forms:

Inserted interventions can take place in empty buildings, in which case projects tend to last longer.

Modular interventions, such as mobile vans or other kinds of "pods", are flexible and usually located in the public spaces, such as a square or high street.

Pop-up shops & stalls provide temporary opportunities for targeted participation. They can be used to provide information or engage members of the public in debate on a particular issue. These pop up stalls could appear at the local supermarket, community event, or even a pub!

Participation exercises that could be carried out at a Pop Up Democracy stall could include, questionnaires; idea generation; issue mapping; or co-creation of policy.

Community Councils could set up Pop Up stalls where young people socialise and engage participants in issues around ***lack of youth activities***. Community Councilors could use Pop Up Democracy to find out the types of services and opportunities young people want in the area and use this information to work with the city council to make these requests a reality.

**3. Online Engagement:**                              ***parking and speed enforcement***

Social media is one way Community Councilors can engage the community but there are also lots of tools that can help produce deeper participation exercises including: idea generation, discussion, deliberation, prioritisation, and even voting.

Community Councils could use an idea generation tool to find out the communities priorities or ideas to improve local services. For example, Community Councils could use online tools to crowd source ideas to improve local ***parking, road safety and speed enforcement***.

For more information about digital tools for engagement, a report by The Democratic Society can be found at: <http://www.demsoc.org/participatory-budgeting-in-scotland/>

#### 4. Community Audits/ Reporting: *public transport*

This participation method is when the community reviews a service using a standardised survey and results can be used to improve that service. Alternatively the public could be encouraged to use multimedia to report on their experiences in their community and their insights can help shape future policy in their area.

For example a Community Council could provide community members with a score card for them to assess *public transport* in the area. Or perhaps the community could be asked to take pictures and videos of parking problems in the area and these could be used to help highlight areas where changes to parking protocol need to take place.

#### 5. Participatory Budgeting (PB):

Participatory Budgeting is the process of local people deciding how public money should be spent. A standard PB process could involve idea generation, proposal submission, proposal analysis and deliberation, and a public vote to decide what projects should receive funding.

More and more Community Councils are exploring Participatory Budgeting. More information can be found at [www.PBScotland.Scot](http://www.PBScotland.Scot)

#### 6. Charrettes/Community Planning: *student accommodation*

Charrettes are collaborative sessions in which a group of designers work with the public to draft a solution to a design problem in the area. For example charrettes could be used to help the public co-design a new building development or redesign the use of local roads.

Community visioning encompasses a range of approaches that enable members of a community to generate ideas for improving or enhancing the place where they live, and to develop a shared vision and action plan for change as a result.

These methods are usually used in planning or developments so people can have impact on changes in their local area. A community council could use a charrette to discuss *student accommodation* in the area and to assess the needs of students and others in the community to build accommodation that is sufficient for the local student population but is also designed in such a way that it minimises impact on local residents.

#### 7. Citizen Panels: *hospital closure*

Citizen Panels are a deliberative forum that runs for a period of time for participants to engage with a particular issue. Citizens are selected randomly to reflect the diversity of the community and they hear evidence from experts and work together to form considered opinions and judgments about the issue at hand.

For example a Citizen Panel could be used to discuss and decide options relating to the *closure of a local hospital*. The outcome does not need to be binary (i.e. close the hospital, or not), participants should have the opportunity to have enough evidence and options available for them to make a decision that works best for the community within the context of a particular situation.