

## Highland Community Planning Partnership

### Community Planning Board – 3 June 2015

Agenda Item	3i.
Report No	CPB 06/15

#### Participatory democracy and community empowerment

Report by Head of Policy and Reform

##### Summary

As background information for presentations being made to the CPP Board in June 2015, this report summarises the key findings from the Strengthening Local Democracy Commission, and the other drivers for supporting participatory democracy and community empowerment within the Highland CPP. The links between the democracy and inequalities are highlighted and the findings are relevant for all public bodies in the partnership as well as the third sector.

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 The CPP Board has agreed that one priority for the CPP is to engage in dialogue with communities in order to empower them to participate in service planning and delivery.
- 1.2 Over the previous two CPP Board meetings community empowerment has been a theme, with reports on:
  - The implications of the Community Empowerment Bill for the CPP, with new duties on public bodies to support the new rights for community bodies to be more involved, for communities to have more control over decisions affecting them and for further support for community right to buy and asset transfers;
  - The Audit Scotland national report: Community planning – turning ambition into action, highlighting the need for better local community planning and agreeing local service priorities with communities;
  - The new partnership work underway on a joint approach to community learning and development;
  - Participatory budgeting as a new way of getting communities involved in budget decisions; and
  - Re-thinking local community planning in Highland, with proposals to be developed locally and with experiments of new approaches to be in place in some areas over the next two years.
- 1.3 More recently at the Chief Officers Groups (COG) meeting in March 2015 it was agreed to work jointly with the third sector to support it further, learning from successful community action and sharing this to build capacity further. This will also identify lessons for public bodies.
- 1.4 In addition at the Health Inequalities Theme Group meeting in May, HIE confirmed that it is working with the Scottish Government to develop the Strategic Interventions for EU funding (ESF) to promote social inclusion and combating poverty and discrimination. The aims are around empowering disadvantaged communities and increasing capacity and innovation within the third sector. The operation of the funds in Highland will be with CPP

involvement.

- 1.5 In keeping with this theme of community empowerment, at the Board meeting in June 2015 presentations will be made on participatory democracy. As supporting information, this report summarises the key points in the Strengthening Local Democracy Commission's publication 'Reconnecting with Communities'. It also includes some contextual information for Highland and draws on other published reports to help us to understand the requirements of participative democracy, including how to involve people less likely to take part.

## 2. Why we need to strengthen local democracy

- 2.1 The Commission's report '[Effective Democracy: Reconnecting with Communities](#)' finds that local democracy in Scotland is seriously out of step with other modern democracies in three main areas set out below. Some additional contextual information for Highland is provided.
- 2.2 1. Disconnect from communities  
Local government operates on a far larger scale than anywhere in Europe with an average of 165,000 people per Council compared to 20,000 in Europe and covering land areas 45 times the European average. Highland is well above the average for population to local government nationally and compared with Europe at 232,950 (2013) and it covers the largest land mass of all local governments at 26,484sq kms, covering 33% of the Scottish land mass.
- 2.3 Fewer services are run through local government, limiting local democratic oversight and influence with functions removed or changed over time e.g. further education, water, community health care, public health and police and fire services.
- 2.4 Local government in Scotland raises only 18% of its tax revenue as % of its total revenue compared to 40% on average in Europe, limiting the scope of local people to influence local spending and priorities. In Highland local taxation accounts for £113.7m out of the annual net revenue budget of £570.4m (19.9%).
- 2.5 2. Effectiveness in dealing with social problems  
The lack of influence over local spending because of taxation arrangements is also seen to leave little room for local creativity and the involvement of people locally in service design or provision. Too much is designed in a top-down way.
- 2.6 Significantly, the Commission finds that our current democratic arrangements have not solved our social problems as our inequalities gap has grown.
- 2.7 These relate to the concentration and accumulation of wealth and land/property ownership in a minority of the population while average real earnings are declining and with growing differences in life expectancy between people living in the most affluent and the poorest areas. One in three working Scots are reported to be earning less than £14,000 a year,

and half earn less than £21,000<sup>1</sup>. Highland tends to have generally lower incomes compared to the Scottish and UK averages and in Highland the difference in life expectancy between people living in the most affluent and poorest areas is 14 years<sup>2</sup>. In the 12 month period from January to December 2014, 2352 vouchers were issued for the 10 food banks in Highland, feeding 2931 adults and 1094 children<sup>3</sup>.

### 3. Democratic ethos

- 2.8 Fundamentally the Commission challenges our concept of democracy and the value we place on it. It highlights that local democracy has no status or protection in law and is subject to the will of the national government of the time.
- 2.9 It finds that we regard democracy as being about institutions of government, forgetting that in a democracy power lies with the people; people are the government.  
This is connected to citizens being viewed only as consumers of public services.
- 2.10 Linked to the issues of scale above, the Commission finds that there has been a view that that ‘you can be local or efficient – but not both’; this distances people from being involved or as the Commission describes ‘shuts people as assets out’.
- 2.11 These points highlight the change in ethos and attitudes required to create a new and more deliberative form of democracy.
- 2.12
- 2.13 Looking back at how local democracy has changed in Scotland and noting that 40 years ago over 200 Councils existed, the Commission regards this as ‘one of the most radical programmes of delocalisation that (it) can identify anywhere in the world.’ (p.8). Consequently it finds that it is difficult for people generally to take part in their democracy, as they are remote from where decisions are made, and it is even harder for some communities of place and of interest to be involved.
- 2.14 Feedback from the Council’s survey of the Citizens’ Panel in 2015 aligns with the view that people in the Highlands feel they have little influence over decisions affecting them or find barriers to being involved. It also shows considerable interest in being involved. The key points fed back from the Citizens’ Panel are listed in **Appendix 1**. A key statistic is that only 18% of Highland residents feel they had some or a great deal of influence over decision-making in their local area, compared to 43% saying they had not very much influence and 38.5% saying they felt they had no influence at all.

### 3. **The ambition for change: remodelling democracy**

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<sup>1</sup> Laurie Macfarlane: Towards a new prosperity for Scotland pp3- 12 in Bunce, L. Escobar, O. Harvie, P. Hinde, D. Hunter, S. Kelly, J. Macfarlane, L. Matthews, P. Moyes, V. Shields, K. Summers, A. Young, E. (2014) Scotland 44: Ideas for a new nation, The Post Collective, Edinburgh

<sup>2</sup> Highland Single Outcome Agreement 2013/14 to 2018/19.

<sup>3</sup> This is the most recent data, sourced from the Distributors report 1st January 2014-31st July 2014

3.1 As well as providing analysis of why change is needed the Commission sets out an ambitious agenda for change. This ambition is about creating: ‘.. a vibrant new democracy for this century and a stronger, more equal society.’ (p.37). It means localising decision-making, starting with power residing locally and then questioning what should be aggregated and shared from the bottom up for all public services, and ensuring everyone can be involved. This is a re-current theme in the report:

*“We have tried taking power to the centre and it has just not delivered. It is time for a much more local approach. .... people and organisations are recognising that the top down approach has had its time.” (p.4)*

*We need: ‘..to (re)empower local people and local communities to have an active... role in their own governance.’ (p.14)*

*‘... we need to reimagine the whole system of government and rebuild it so that local priorities and choices are resolved much closer to communities.’ (p.35)*

One idea is for 150-200 community governments with responsibility for all local community services as one sphere of government.

3.2 The Commission sets out seven principles of: sovereignty; subsidiarity; transparency; participation; spheres not tiers of governance; interdependency; and wellbeing. It identifies four focal points for reform:

1. Democracy from the community up, not top down – built around subsidiarity and empowerment and clarity in the different ‘spheres of Government’ each with clarity on their democratic mandate.
2. Community accountability for all locally delivered services.
3. Variation instead of one size fits all – different contexts need different responses.
4. Decision making at the right scale.

3.3 The Commission is also very concerned about those not likely to engage and ‘..that the most marginalised individuals and communities – who potentially have the most to gain from real choice and control locally – are the least ready to participate. Most worrying of all, some communities (of place and interest) are virtually absent in today’s democracy altogether.... (so) democracy is not simply for those that can organise themselves to demand it.’ (p.28)

#### **4. Making best use of the Commission’s report**

4.1 In addition to considering the 25 recommendations in the Commission’s report we can also:

1. Identify other actions suggested from or inspired by the Commission’s report. Not all the report themes or ideas were translated into specific recommendations and we will have our own ideas too.

2. Draw on the knowledge about making democracy work. Many of the Commission's findings have a theoretical underpinning and much is published that critiques certain approaches. We can learn from this body of work helping us to be more creative and effective with our proposals, enhancing the Commission's recommendations and contributing to knowledge.
3. Appreciate that our efforts need to be collaborative; with communities of place and interest, with those not normally engaged, with current and new partners and with government. This dialogue will create new ideas and generate proposals we cannot predict at this time. Also as new ways of working are tested some will be more successful than others. Building dialogue and learning from this experience into the design of a programme of change will help us to be more experimental and transformative, meeting the Commission's ambition better. The CPP Board did approve in March 2015 for local ideas to be encouraged and for some local experiments to be developed.

4.2 Taking this more comprehensive and creative approach is in keeping with the Commission's intentions. It is clear that it does not want to prescribe what should be done in a top-down way; instead it states: 'Our ideas are intended to begin the transformation, and are not meant to be seen as the final word.' Recognising that '...strengthening local democracy will not be a straight forward or neat process.' (p.36) So the recommendations can be tested, adapted and others tried depending on local contexts and what is agreed locally.

4.3 This approach also aligns with the timescales proposed by the Commission. It states that: '... we know that rebuilding democracy will take time and that creating the conditions for real localism to work may be a 10 to 15 year objective.' (p.37). It recommends dialogue begins and new ways of participation are tested with fuller implementation after the 2020 Scottish Parliamentary elections. Also that this will be:

'...an evolutionary process shaped by local needs and priorities, not a big bang, and it has to build progressively from where we are now.... It must happen in ways that let people take control of what it would take to build more prosperous and fairer communities.'(p.16)

## 5. **Taking forward the 25 recommendations made by the Commission**

5.1 **Appendix 2** lists 19 of the Commission's 25 recommendations that require dialogue with the Scottish Government initially and/or action is required by national government(s).

5.2 **Appendix 3** lists eight of the 25 recommendations that CPPs could take forward. To some extent some of these are supported by the Community Empowerment Bill, e.g.:

- Recommendations 11 and 16: A binding duty on local governments and locally delivered public services to support and empower individuals

and communities to participate in local decision-making; and for all CPPs develop an approach to community scrutiny to complement existing arrangements. These could be enabled through the new right in the Bill to participate in improving an outcome.

- Recommendations 12 and 17: A specific duty to ensure that all groups likely to face barriers to participating are supported and resourced to do so; and a significant and systematic reinvestment in Community Learning and Development in each area of Scotland. The amendments at Stage 2 of the Bill emphasise the importance of participation with communities throughout the community planning process with a specific emphasis on those experiencing inequalities

5.3 **Appendix 4** lists eight Commission recommendations that local government can take forward. The Council is already starting to revisit the Scheme of Delegation through the review of Area Committees and local partnership arrangements and participatory budgeting is being considered. It is worth noting that at Stage 2 the Bill was amended for ‘.. Ministers to require Scottish public authorities to promote and facilitate the participation of members of the public in the authority’s decisions and activities, including the allocation of its resources/budgets – i.e. what is known as “participatory budgeting”..’

## 6. **Other actions suggested by or inspired by the Commission’s report**

6.1 Other actions suggested in the Commission’s report are:

1. A national review or stock take of democratic governance is taken forward by local and national government and for there to be a national conversation about it throughout communities - ‘.. allowing communities themselves to fully participate in decisions about their own governance.’ (p.7)
2. To develop a network of new local democratic experiments and for them to grow in strength and number, with the report providing examples of citizens’ jury, citizens’ assembly, mini publics and participatory budgeting.
3. A culture change - warning against modest ideas’ that don’t challenge the current system and recognising that ‘..it will take time to build the habits of democracy..’ (p.27) And the need to be aware that: ‘..we also know that it is difficult to approach our recommendations with an open mind about how democracy might change in the future. Most people have only ever experienced our current kind of democracy, and all of us in Scotland, the Commission included, are at least in part driven by the culture and values that we are used to.’ (p.36) This challenges us to think about our default behaviours and institutional norms. One area identified by the Commission is around the barriers we create to participation<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> On the issue of enabling full participation the Commission sees it not being about the capability of marginalised people but more about our institutional practice: ‘In our view, it is not those furthest from

4. Fostering social capital – supporting communities to deliver better outcomes for themselves through their networks, associations and third sector activity.

## **7. Learning from knowledge about making democracy work**

7.1 Several contributions from academia (theories and critiques) are highlighted below. They are not exhaustive but they do shed light on how we might proceed and what we need to watch out for.

### 7.2 On participation in democracy- theory and practice

There is much in the Commission's findings that align with the work of John Dewey, a philosopher and educationalist from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. He saw democracy as a social and ethical ideal. His theory of the state is of its role in protecting individuals in the rights they already have, with a purpose of enabling a more equitable distribution of rights among individuals. He makes the distinction between democracy as a social ideal and political democracy as a system of government; 'Government is not the state, for that includes the public as well as the rulers charged with special duties and powers.' (1927, p.27-28). Government is made up of every member of society. As well as reminding us to understand and be clear about the meaning of democracy and the purpose of government in serving the community, his work is of use in:

- Considering how to advance democracy in keeping with the Commission's ambition – he is attributed with the saying 'the cure for the ailments of democracy is more democracy' but he warns that this is not the case if it is just doing more of the same and focusing change only on our institutions or refining what is in place. There also need for education around being part of a community. While this supports a more radical agenda as set out by the Commission, including new local democratic experiments, it also raises issues about education and community learning and development as other areas of work to support a democratic ethos.

Reminding us about resistance to change and the problem of our default behaviours not only in how they may hold us back from making the change required, but also in the context of how we discuss, listen to others and may be persuaded by different ideas<sup>6</sup>. He supports strongly the practice of dialogue to challenge thinking and create more consensual solutions for community life, criticising

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democracy or facing the greatest inequalities are somehow less able to articulate what they need to happen for outcomes to improve in their communities. We found that people are more than capable of doing so. Instead, the challenge is to make sure that this understanding is shared, heard and believed in, and that those voices are directly involved in developing the solutions.' (p.28).

<sup>5</sup> See for example John Dewey (1927) The public and its problems.

<sup>6</sup> 'Habits of opinion are the toughest of all habits; when they have become second nature, and are supposedly thrown out of the door, they creep in again as stealthily and surely as does first nature. And as they are modified, the alteration first shows itself negatively, in the disintegration of old beliefs, to be replaced by floating, volatile and accidentally snatched up opinions.' (1927, p162).

the notion of government by experts<sup>7</sup>. He promotes the need for difference of opinion and constructive confrontation for democracy to function. This raises the issue of organisational and staff development in participative approaches including in dialogue as an essential practice<sup>8</sup>.

- Sowing the seeds of the idea of social capital – he highlights the importance of the associations people have with others in their community and the groups they participate in for us to have fulfilling lives and for democracy to function well. For him democracy is the ‘..idea of community life itself.’ (1927, p.148) and this supports the Commission’s theme of fostering social capital and not expecting everything to be done by state institutions.

7.3 Dewey’s concepts lend weight to the Commission’s findings and reinforce the need to consider this agenda as re-imagining democracy and being aware of our habits that might hold us back.

7.4 His work has spawned much further thought and guidance that we can draw on, and notably the current work of Dr Oliver Escobar (Edinburgh University) attending the CPP Board meeting in June 2015. He specialises in participatory democracy and writes about methods such as public dialogue and deliberation, participatory budgeting and mini publics. He spoke recently at the Scottish Leaders Forum (December 2014) and the national community planning conference arranged by the Government last summer.

7.5 Other useful sources of information are available, for example see the Co-Intelligence Institute [www.co-intelligence.org](http://www.co-intelligence.org) **Appendix 5** summarises the arts of democracy.

7.6 On links between participation and effective institutions

Other research to draw on includes the seminal work of Robert Putnam from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. Exploring what makes some democratic governments work and others fail, he studied six regions in Italy, concluding that social capital and social trust were integral to effective democracy and integral to economic development. Regional government was found to function far better, and with better economic performance, where the routine presence of reciprocity (returning a kindness), social trust, participation in associations and networks of civic engagement were stronger. This is especially the case where people from different backgrounds can mix with each other. This was

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<sup>7</sup> ‘A class of experts is inevitably so removed from common interests as to become a class with private interests and private knowledge, which in social matters is not knowledge at all....No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interests of the few.....The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses.’ (1927, p.208)

<sup>8</sup> Methods of debate, discussion and persuasion are seen as essential, stressing the importance of face to face relationships with direct give and take. In supporting this dialogue he states: ‘Ideas which are not communicated, shared, and re-born in expression are but soliloquy, and soliloquy is but broken and imperfect thought.’ (1927, p.218) and ‘Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator.’ (1927,p.219)

<sup>9</sup> Putnam R (1993) Making Democracy Work, Civic Traditions in Modern Italy.



found in the northern regions of Italy, compared to the south where hierarchical and feudal social relations prevailed and where regional government was less effective and the economy underperformed.

- 7.7 This supports the Commission's recognition of the need to foster social capital. While Putnam concludes that 'Building social capital will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work.' (1993,p185), in the Highlands we do have a culture of voluntary activity (volunteering and prevalence of voluntary associations) especially in rural communities. This may indicate that we are well placed for communities to deliver better outcomes for themselves through their networks. This might affect the types of local democratic experiments to undertake and the type of support voluntary activity might need to flourish and be sustained.
- 7.8 In learning from experiments to improve democracy and economic regeneration, there are recent studies in the UK to draw on.
- 7.9 Barnes, Newman and Sullivan researched 17 examples of public involvement in two English cities, reporting in 2007<sup>10</sup>. Their work explores the relationship between the citizen and the state and identified four types of relationships: an empowered public (addressing inequalities); a consuming public (as highlighted by the Commission); the public as stakeholders (more participatory and dealing with diversity); and a responsible public (reciprocal arrangements and greater self-sufficiency). Depending on the relationship the role of the state differs. In these terms the Commission sees the need for us to move from the consuming public to a more empowered, stake holding and responsible public.
- 7.10 The types of public participation studied included those aimed at: regeneration and poverty reduction; forums to involve particular groups and particular places including area forums and area committees; third sector led advocacy initiatives; and service specific initiatives.
- 7.11 The main findings of relevance for us were:
- Seeing people only as consumers of services is inadequate in understanding why people get or would want to get involved (in keeping with the Commission's findings). A real shift from a consumerist to other types of relationship has to mean a change in the power relationships operating. The motives for community development differed between professionals and communities (professionals saw it as a means of getting a service, so still in the 'consuming' public mind set);
  - The partnerships developed were unequal and professionals continued to hold power. There is also a need to be aware of the boundary between members of a group and those funded by and working for or attached to government agencies and how they are perceived. Change was more challenging of professionals when it was led by voluntary organisations and social movements, particularly where these were led

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<sup>10</sup> Barnes M, Newman J, Sullivan H (2007) Power, participation and political renewal: case studies in public participation..

well.

- The importance of dialogue: 'Central to success in making change appeared to be the preparedness of *listening* to others and the capacity to *learn* from others.' (2007, p.111) Also we need to think through what brings people to the table and what sustains them to participate in dialogue even when this proves to be frustrating. Creating new spaces for dialogue was highlighted<sup>11</sup>.
- Institutional barriers to change with the authors warning of "... the way in which newly established formal rules can be comprehensively undone by long established norms of behaviour..." (2007, p.123). Capacity building is required for officials as well as communities.
- Success in participation also depended on the skills of people chairing events and in engaging people.
- A sense of community and place is needed: '...individuals need to feel some connection between the scale of the initiative and their sense of 'neighbourhood'" (2007, p.133)
- We need to be alert when engaging with identify groups that we should not assume cohesion within that community - there is complexity in identifications and this raises issues of representation.
- The institutional and cultural context will be important too, concluding that: 'There is, of course, no 'one size fits all' solution to public participation ambitions: multiple objectives, methods and opportunities are important for providing a range of points of potential engagement.' (2007, p.185)
- Finally, the authors see political renewal not just about new techniques of participation and citizen engagement but about '... The capacity of public voices ..... to challenge dominant norms and to question the ways in which the rules of the game are defined.' (2007,p.201).

7.12 So this research highlights the need in practice to challenge current power relations including the role of officers, be aware of institutional barriers to change, the importance of thinking through who participates in the dialogue, using the right skills in leading or chairing events and finding alternative spaces for it. The 'no one size fits all' conclusion is reassuring.

7.13 There are many other critiques highlighting different challenges to participation. For example: on public participation in local partnerships we should not assume that partnership working with communities is any more inclusive than single agency working and care is needed when engaging

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<sup>11</sup> On institutional behaviour the case studies showed that 'Powerful institutions such as local government and NHS bodies, with long-embedded rules and ways of doing things, found it very difficult to resist applying those rules and norms in 'new' deliberative settings. In some cases, the creation of an entirely separate deliberative space, where all participants were outside their 'comfort zones' and where rules and norms were negotiated as part of the deliberative process, provided sufficient scope for changed relationships between the public and the state to begin to emerge. However in other cases none of the actors appeared to be able to resist the pressure of the dominant institutional environment, with the consequence that dialogue was constrained and existing relationships hardened.' (2007, p.132)

community representation rather than direct public engagement<sup>12</sup>. This is of particular relevance when we come to review local community planning arrangements.

- 7.14 Similarly, as more is written about the experience of asset transfer and ownership in communities, this highlights not only good practice and positive outcomes but also some sobering issues, and warning against seeing community ownership as a panacea for participation and better democracy. Experience shows their success can be undermined by a lack of support and the need for the right human, physical, environmental and financial conditions to available pre, during and post any ownership<sup>13</sup>. Others have focused on meeting capacity needs such as training, leadership and forms of governance<sup>14</sup>. We need to learn from this work when we are supporting community ownership and asset transfers as one approach to community empowerment and participation.
- 7.15 Of particular concern to us is learning from rural participation programmes. Much is written and can be helpful to us. Experience from European funded programmes in Northern Ireland shows that we need to be aware of the reasons for under-representation of different groups and not to make assumptions and misinterpret social situations on who is excluded and who is not<sup>15</sup>. In writing about North West Wales we are reminded of the need to be aware of local community divisions and conflicts in rural communities and how those may play out in participation programmes<sup>16</sup>. Local member and ward manager knowledge will be helpful in understanding these issues.
- 7.16 On poverty and participation  
Given the Commission's joint aims of improving democracy for a fairer society, efforts for public participation need to be aware of processes of exclusion. With poverty seen more than about income levels, Lister<sup>17</sup> has listened to how people in poverty describe their experience. She explains their lack of voice and powerlessness as a form of poverty, with their citizenship diminished by the daily experience of 'getting by'; living not only with limited material resources but also shame, stigma and eroded dignity, not least due to a process of 'Othering' by some politicians, institutions and the media. So there is additional challenge in how to enable participation of people in poverty and we need to be more thoughtful in our approaches, certainly countering the 'Othering' processes.

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<sup>12</sup> Lowndes, V & Sullivan, H (2006) Like a horse and Carriage of a Fish on a bicycle: How well do Local Partnerships and Public Participation go Together? Local Government Studies Vol 30 No.1 pp51-73

<sup>13</sup> Aitken, B., Cairns, B., Taylor, M. and Moran R (2011) Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding Joseph Rowntree Foundation [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

<sup>14</sup> Skerratt, S, and Hall, C (2011) Management of community-owned facilities post-acquisition: brokerage for shared learning Local Economy 26(8) 663-678

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<sup>15</sup> Shortall, S (2008) Are rural development programmes socially inclusive? Social inclusion, civic engagement, participation and social capital: exploring the differences. Journal of Rural Studies, 24 pp 450-457

<sup>16</sup> Mann, R., Plows, A. and Patterson, C. (2011) Civilising community? A critical exploration of local civil society in North West Wales. Voluntary Sector Review Vol 2 No. 3 pp317-35

<sup>17</sup> Lister. R, (2004) Poverty, Polity Press, Cambridge.

7.17 Members are aware of the issues around rural poverty and this adds complexity for rural participation to reduce inequality. Rural development aimed at inclusion has been criticised as favouring ‘the articulate, well networked and vocal’<sup>18</sup>. This point is made too by Shucksmith<sup>19</sup> and his concern about ‘local notables’ dominating rural regeneration projects in Scotland, stating that:

“Even where projects address the needs of marginalised groups, the volunteers (unlike their urban counterparts) tend to come from better-off households rather than from socially excluded groups.’ He continues ‘In many instances existing power-holders become more powerful, partly as a results of the failure to consider systems of governance and the dimension of power....Doubts exist therefore about the extent to which empowerment in rural areas is possible without reorganisation of systems of governance and power, and without promoting the active involvement of socially excluded or disadvantaged groups. Often neither empowerment or rural people nor widespread participation have been achieved.” (p48)

This makes him wonder if an area-based approach is best for promoting social inclusion in rural areas given that poorer and marginalised people are dispersed and hidden.

7.18 Similarly Milbourne<sup>20</sup> highlights the different dynamics of rural poverty with welfare support less well developed and potentially a less sympathetic anti-poverty agenda found in rural communities. Having researched the process of ‘othering’ in the rural context of Wales he identifies a culture of self-sufficiency and negative attitudes towards welfare provision as reinforcing the shame poor rural households feel, contributing to their denial and secrecy about it; thus making it harder for them to participate.<sup>21</sup> We need to be aware of these processes on exclusion in rural communities if we are to develop effective approaches for public participation.

## 8. Conclusion

8.1 The Commission’s findings are stark and its ambition is radical given where we are now. A managerial approach to taking it forward would focus on the 25 recommendations within the report. But the ambition of the Commission requires us to fundamentally re-think what we mean by democracy, what kind of citizens we want to be and what kind of community associations and public institutions we need to support it. A more philosophical reflection is needed, backed with practical action that draws on direct and mindful participation of everyone, testing new approaches and learning from experiments and practice in Highland and those already researched elsewhere.

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<sup>18</sup> Skerratt, S. and Steiner, A. (2013) Working with communities-of-place: complexities of empowerment Local Economy 28(3) pp320-338 (p323)

<sup>19</sup> Shucksmith M (2000) Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas JRF

<sup>20</sup> Milbourne P, 2010 ‘Putting poverty and welfare in place’ Policy and Politics vol 38 no 1 153-69.

<sup>21</sup> <sup>21</sup> Milbourne P, 2013 ‘Poverty, place and rurality: material and sociocultural disconnections’ Environment and Planning A volume 45, 1-15

8.2 It is hoped that this paper is helpful for deliberation on how the CPP can improve local community planning and tackle inequalities.

Author: Carron McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform 20.5.15

### Feedback from the Highland residents on democratic engagement

#### Citizens' Panel results 2015

Positive feedback shows:

- 77% of respondents said they were interested in the democratic process;
- 69% said they wanted to be involved in decision in their area (with people aged 16-24 years more likely to want this involvement – at 89% compared to 56% of those aged over 65 years).
- Over 50% said in the past 12 months they participated in voting in an election, created or signed a paper or e-petition and contacted their Councillor, MSP, MP or MEP;
- 53% said they wanted to be involved in decision making in the country as a whole, with higher levels among 16-24 year olds (at 72% compared to 41% of those aged over 65 years).
- More people agreed than disagreed that every citizen should get involved in politics if democracy is to work (48% compared to 22%) and that they enjoyed working with other people on common problems in their community (39% compared to 20%).
- More people agreed than disagreed that the Council is helpful and listens to local people.

Feedback showing that more needs to be done to support democratic engagement includes:

- Only 18% felt they had some or a great deal of influence over decision-making in their local area, compared to 43% saying they had not very much influence and 38.5% saying they felt they had no influence at all.
- More people disagreed than agreed that the Council represented their views (26% compared to 25%) and involved them in how it spends money (48% compared to 20%).
- More people disagreed than agreed that they would do a good job as a local councillor or MSP/MP (36% compared to 31%).
- More people disagreed than agreed with the statement 'when people like me get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run' (36% compared to 33%).
- The main personal barriers for limiting influence were: lack of time, feeling their opinion would not be listened to, not being given the opportunity, not knowing how to get involved, not feeling qualified enough, not knowing enough about decisions and not feeling able to make a difference.

## Appendix 2

### **Commission recommendations requiring dialogue with the Scottish Government initially and/or action by national government(s)**

Numbering per the publication and \* indicates those also included in Appendices 3 and/or 4

1. A fundamental review of the structure, boundaries, functions and democratic arrangements for local governance of all public services in Scotland. The review to ensure it includes everyone, particularly ‘.. those who are furthest from democracy...’ (p.17)

2. The review above to be jointly undertaken by Scottish Government and local government and designed and resourced to enable the full participation of communities across Scotland. (p.19)

3. A new ‘right to challenge’ in the democratic system, including the right for local government to challenge functions currently delivered by national agencies (p.19)

4. Local democratic accountability for community health services and public health as part of the development of an integrated approach to prevention locally (p.19)\*

5. That local governments, having engaged their communities should have the right to veto and require change in local police and fire plans (p.19)\*

6 -10 recommendations on local taxation: 6. Local taxation options together should raise at least 50% of income locally (p.23). 7. Local government has full control of all property based taxes and freedom to set them locally (p.23). 8. Local people should decide levels of taxation (p. 23). 9. Local government to be able to set and raise new taxes (p.23). 10. All above local taxation options to be reviewed (p.23)

11. A binding duty on local governments and locally delivered public services to support and empower individuals and communities to participate in local decision-making (p.30)\*

12. A specific duty to ensure that all groups likely to face barriers to participating are supported and resourced to do so (p.30)\*

18. Establishment of a centre of excellence in participatory democracy to research good practices and promote and support their use (p.30)\*

20. The principles set out in the European Charter of Local Self Government have to be put on a statutory basis in Scotland (p.35)

21. The competencies of democratic bodies at all levels of the system should be codified so that their roles are transparent and accountable to all citizens (p.35)\*

22. Scottish Ministers should be placed under a legal duty to ‘local proof’ all legislation through a subsidiarity test (p.35)

23. An independent Commissioner is established to scrutinise compatibility of UK and Scottish policy and legislation and provisions of the law (p.35)

24. National elected governments have a clear mandate to establish priorities for the nation and to set and protect citizens’ rights in law (p.35)

25. Independent Office of Wellbeing is established to independently monitor and report on the impact of fiscal and macro-economic policy on communities’ wellbeing. P35

### Commission recommendations that CPPs could begin work on now

#### Recommendation 5

That local governments, having engaged their communities should have the right to veto and require change in local police and fire plans (p.19)\*

#### Recommendation 11

A binding duty on local governments and locally delivered public services to support and empower individuals and communities to participate in local decision-making p30\*

#### Recommendation 12

A specific duty to ensure that all groups likely to face barriers to participating are supported and resourced to do so (p.30)\*

#### Recommendation 15

Every CPP works with its communities to design and implement a clear empowerment scheme (p.30)

#### Recommendation 16

All CPPs develop an approach to community scrutiny to complement existing arrangements (p.30)

#### Recommendation 17

A significant and systematic reinvestment in Community Learning and Development in each area of Scotland (p.30)

#### Recommendation 18

Establishment of a centre of excellence in participatory democracy to research good practices and promote and support their use (p.30)\*

#### Recommendation 19

That after these measures have been established a stock-take is undertaken to determine their impact and identify what further steps are required. (p.30)

\*Recommendations are also included in Appendices 2 and 4



### **Commission recommendations Local Government could begin work on now**

#### Recommendation 4

Local democratic accountability for community health services and public health as part of the development of an integrated approach to prevention locally (p.19)\*

#### Recommendation 5

That local governments, having engaged their communities should have the right to veto and require change in local police and fire plans (p.19)\*

#### Recommendation11

A binding duty on local governments and locally delivered public services to support and empower individuals and communities to participate in local decision-making (p.30)\*

#### Recommendation 12

A specific duty to ensure that all groups likely to face barriers to participating are supported and resourced to do so. (p.30)\*

#### Recommendation 13

All local governments revisit their scheme of decentralisation (p.30)

#### Recommendation 14

A process of participatory budgeting, covering tax and spending options, is adopted by all local governments to enhance local choices over tax and spend within a new system of local government finance (p.30)

#### Recommendation18

Establishment of a centre of excellence in participatory democracy to research good practices and promote and support their use (p.30)\*

#### Recommendation 21

The competencies of democratic bodies at all levels of the system should be codified so that their roles are transparent and accountable to all citizens (p.35)\*

\*Recommendations are also included in Appendix 2 and/or Appendix 3

### Living democracy: The Arts of Democracy:

- Active listening – it reflects back what is heard and allows both the listener and speaker to find greater understanding through the listening process.
- Public dialogue – requires conscious commitment to explore – asking ‘why’ – ‘why do you and I think as we do and to what ends?’ Needs to have an environment for full participation and look at differences as occasions for examining underlying assumptions. Asking questions and listening to points of view we don’t share.
- Creative conflict – needs critical, constructive, honest and open confrontation. This can give clarity and learning – each understanding better why the other side feels the way it does. Helps define the problem more accurately, not jumping to conclusions, can provide light to generate new idea rather than just heat of argument. Because people are different conflict is inevitable.
- Political imagination – and to see the other person’s view point.
- Reflection/evaluation – How did you feel? What worked? What didn’t work? How could we do better?
- Public judgement – deeper than public opinion.
- Accountability – report cards for public officials.

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