



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

25
—YEARS—
BLIADHNA



Participation and Communities Team Sgioba Com- pàirteachadh is Coimhearsnachd

Approach to Working With
Communities



Introduction

The Scottish Parliament's role is to examine the work of the Scottish Government, make new laws on devolved matters and debate the issues of the day.

Since 2018 The Scottish Parliament has been developing the way it supports and challenges committees to undertake more innovative and meaningful engagement.

A significant part of this work is supported by the Participation and Communities Team (PACT).

PACT's mission is to provide participation expertise to embed the involvement and impact of more diverse and missing voices in the life and work of the Parliament.

PACT's approach is to work in partnership with people and organisations (e.g., charities, community organisations, business groups) to design and apply participation methods to support people with lived experience to contribute to Parliamentary work.

Since PACT's establishment the team delivers their work with a continuous improvement focus to learn from the people and communities we work with.

“The traditional model of Parliamentary scrutiny has its strengths, but it prioritises the views of those who already have an understanding of what the Parliament is doing and who have the skills and the resources to engage effectively. Many ordinary people are, in practice, side-lined or ignored, either because they are unaware of the opportunity to engage or because their circumstances make engaging too difficult. As a result, valuable experience and perspectives are missed.”

Embedding Public Participation in the Work of Parliament Inquiry
– Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

Purpose and Principles

The overarching purpose of this plan is to articulate how the Participation and Communities Team will continue to develop its ongoing relationships with communities to create broader, richer and stronger connections, to enable more missing voices to impact the work of Parliament.

Over the last seven years PACT has sought to embed the principles of community development in our approach to involving people in scrutiny (*annex1*).

It is our responsibility to take a proactive approach to ensure that we involve people from across society. Our Action Plan articulates the way we will do this and the actions we intend to take over the next year.

The plan draws from what we've learned from communities including evaluation data from many years of participation work, conference evaluations from previous events with the communities sector and most recently feedback gathered from the [Presiding Officers 25th Anniversary regional programme](#) of community engagement.

What we've learned can broadly be categorised under the following 5 themes

- **Improve Parliamentary Awareness** – People often didn't understand the role of Parliament, and the relevance to them and their lives and how they could get involved.
- **Increase Community Engagement** – people want to see the Parliament in communities. With more opportunities to meet MSPs and get involved in ways that are in-person, informal, friendly and in community settings.
- **Build Confidence and Capacity** – People said they don't feel confident to get involved, for example it wasn't for them or for people like them. They often didn't know how to get involved or have enough information, time or resources. And when they did, they felt they would not be listened to, or would be judged.
- **Improve Accessibility** – People felt that what information is available can be inaccessible, reports were too long, language was alienating and used jargon and there needed to be information and opportunities in a wider range of formats.
- **Increase Diversity** – People felt that Parliament was not a place for them and needed to take more proactive steps to include a wider range of people. They did not see people like them represented in Parliament.

We have learned that working in partnership, developing trust, sharing knowledge and establishing shared priorities are the foundations for community participation.

This is an approach PACT has tried and tested in Parliamentary Session 5 and 6 and through the actions detailed in our plan we seek to strengthen these methods and approaches.

How we will deliver this

PACT have a team of specialists who provide a link between parliamentary business and communities across Scotland.

The team members are positioned within each of the Committees to support any participation requirements; this includes PACT's approach to develop and maintain an understanding of issues and relationships within communities. This provides a bridge between parliamentary business and the people of Scotland.

PACT specialises in a range of participation methods to meet the needs of participants and communities we engage with.

Using the principles that underpin a community development approach (*annex 1*) and by working in partnership we aim to develop our capacity to reach and empower communities to involve individuals in scrutiny.

We work in collaboration with service teams across the Parliament including Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Public Engagement Services Office (PESO), Parliament Communications Office (PCO), and Committee Clerking teams to enable high quality participatory experiences for a diverse range of people and communities to participate in the business of the Parliament.

This approach will ensure that we continue to deliver our participatory work by working with and understanding *how* communities want to participate with the Scottish Parliament.

12 Month action plan

Parliamentary Awareness

PACT will work to ensure we have the resources and capacity to support communities to participate in Parliament and communicating the availability of these resources.

Actions

- Over the next year PACT will work with colleagues in the Public Engagement Services Office (PESO) and Parliament Communications Office (PCO) to review existing resources and create new resources and initiatives to broaden awareness of the work of Parliament and how to get involved.
- PACT will review their communications strategy ensuring that it meets the need of key stakeholders and complements wider Parliament communications.

Community Engagement

PACT will aim to strengthen our community development approach; by committing time and resources to proactively scoping and researching excluded and marginalised communities, identifying missing voices, (whether by geography, identity or shared interest), building relationships and establishing new connections.

Actions

- We will visit each of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland at least once per year to meet with key anchor and infrastructure bodies with the aim of reaching grass roots organisations, marginalised and excluded communities and developing an understanding of key issues in the area with a view, for example, to supporting committee participation.
- 8 of the visits outlined in the above action will involve working in partnership with community groups to run one event in each parliamentary region over the next year. These events will be community led and provide an opportunity for local people to set the agenda, meet their elected representatives and tell Parliament what the key issues are in their area.

Confidence and Capacity

PACT will increase our understanding of communities' needs through our community development work.

Actions

- We will design an impact framework that will help us to track, evaluate, understand and communicate the impact of people's participation in Parliamentary work
- We will deliver an annual communities initiative (such as a conference) to share knowledge and learn from the third, charitable and voluntary sector.

Accessibility

PACT will embed best practice by exploring our accessibility through partnership work with key stakeholders

Actions

- We will work with relevant colleagues across the Parliament to embed best practice in ensuring the work of PACT is available in a range of alternative formats.
- We will continue to explore and embed innovative and alternative participation options including through digital participation, deliberative democracy, participation without MSPs and ways for communities to influence committee work programmes

Increase Diversity

PACT will develop a better understanding of what we do well, where the gaps are and what we can improve.

Actions

- We will use the knowledge and experience gained through community development work to influence the development of the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy and increase the diversity of voices engaged in scrutiny.
- We will work with partner organisations, with input from children and young people to incorporate the UNCRC into the work of the Scottish Parliament.

Evaluation and Next Steps

PACT evaluates all engagement that it delivers using the following processes:

- Surveys completed by all stakeholders including Parliamentary staff, Members and participants
- Producing regular case studies
- Tracking of the impact of community engagement participation in parliamentary business

PACT evaluates its work based on the team's priorities and also to contribute to the delivery of organisational wide KPIs.

The outputs and learning from this one-year action plan will be incorporated into a wider organisational Communities Strategy and the Scottish Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy.

We will review the delivery of our action plan after 12 months and publish this on our webpage along with an update on how the findings will help inform these wider strategies. We will incorporate learning and feedback from the Communities Conference and finalise how we measure our actions across the next year.

We will regularly update our stakeholders through our PACT newsletter, the PACT Annual Report and provide a summary at our next annual communities initiative.

Annex 1

Community Development

Community Development starts from the belief that everyone should have equal access to health, wellbeing, justice, wealth, & opportunity.

But it also recognises that the way society and structures are organised means some people, groups & communities can end up being excluded & oppressed.

Principles

- ***Self-determination - people and communities have the right to make their own choices and decisions.***
- ***Empowerment - people should be able to control and use their own assets and means to influence.***
- ***Collective action - coming together in groups or organisations strengthens peoples' voices.***
- ***Working and learning together - collaboration and sharing experiences is vital to good community activity."***

- Scottish Community Development Centre

How these principles underpin our practice

Self determination – we build relationships with a range of partners across Scotland who are working with and within communities. We understand that reaching our most vulnerable and marginalised members of society needs to happen through services and organisations within which participants have trust and ongoing support.

We do this by:

- Identifying partnerships and establishing shared priorities
- Developing trust and relationships
- Working with umbrella and anchor organisations with shared values
- Ensuring participants can contribute to design and format of engagement and, as much as possible, engage on their terms.

Empowerment – we develop a range of participation methods that enable communities of interest, community groups or individuals representing a range of communities to contribute to Parliamentary business. We use trauma informed approaches and co-production where possible to ensure the needs of participants are met. We offer learning opportunities to our partners and participants to demystify the processes of Parliament and make them accessible, and we learn from our partners where they can offer an insight in to best practice when engaging their communities.

We do this by:

- Continuous improvement in the team by learning about community development approaches and initiatives
- Delivering Parliamentary awareness sessions
- Listening to communities and adapting to suit

Collective action – we recognise the power of community initiatives to empower and reach all – and that these community initiatives provide essential services and support to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised members of Scotland's population. These initiatives may be place-based or communities of interest and we recognise the need for Parliament to meet people where they are.

We do this by:

- Taking Parliament to communities
- Identifying missing voices
- Amplifying the common experience of certain groups of people by helping their stories reach Parliament/MSPs.

Working and learning together – we seek feedback on a consistent basis from partners who contribute to assisting the Parliament to bring lived experience into Parliamentary business through evaluation and practice sharing; for example going to conferences and seeking opportunities to share practice. We try to communicate the impact of any contribution communities make through their engagement with us through regular Newsletters and an Annual Report of PACT's work and support committees to give updates on the progress of inquiries that people have contributed to.

We do this by:

- Scoping and researching
- Working internally to develop trust, capacity and understanding of how to involve communities.