



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# Key Community Feedback for Session 7

## Prìomh Fhios-air-ais Choimhearsnachdan airson Seisean 7

### Evidence from PACT Community Visits Across Scotland

Fianais bho Thursan Coimhearsnachd a rinneadh le PACT  
air feadh na h-Alba

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## Foreword

The Scottish Parliament was founded on the principles of openness, participation, sharing of power and accountability. Those principles matter not only in how Parliament works, but in how it listens. Through PACT's work with communities across Scotland, we hear directly about the pressures people are facing, the strengths they are drawing on, and the changes they want to see.

This briefing brings together recurring themes from that engagement and offers MSPs a community informed picture of the context facing people and places across the country. Many of the issues will be familiar, but what stands out is their consistency across different local areas, sectors and experiences.

I hope it helps Members understand not only the issues communities are raising, but the wider patterns behind them, and supports parliamentary work that is more informed by lived experience.

### **Chi Kavindele**

Head, Participation and Communities Team (PACT)  
Scottish Parliament

## Ro-ràdh

Chaidh Pàrlamaid na h-Alba a stèidheachadh air prionnsapalan de dh'fhosgarrachd, com-pàirteachadh, co-roinn cumhachd agus cunntachalachd. Tha na prionnsapalan sin cudromach chan ann a-mhàin a thaobh mar a tha a' Phàrlamaid ag obair, ach mar a tha i ag èisteachd. Tron obair a tha PACT air a bhith a' dèanamh ann an coimhearsnachdan air feadh na h-Alba, tha sinn a' cluinntinn calg-dhìreach mu na cudroman a tha daoine a' giùlan, na neartan air am bi iad a' tarraing agus na h-atharrachaidhean a tha iad airson faicinn.

Tha am pàipear seo a' toirt ri chèile cuspairean a bhios a' tighinn an àird gu cunbhalach bhon chonaltradh sin agus tha e a' tabhann do Bhuill dealbh, a tha fiosraichte le eòlas choimhearsnachdan, den cho-theacsa airson daoine is àitichean air feadh na dùthcha. Bidh sibh eòlach air mòran de na cùisean seo, ach 's e na tha a' glacadh aire cho cunbhalach 's tha iad a' tighinn an àird thar diofar sgìrean ionadail, raointean agus eòlasan.

Tha mi an dòchas gum bi seo a' cuideachadh Bhall le bhith a' tuigsinn chan e a-mhàin na cùisean a bhios coimhearsnachdan a' togail ach na pàtran nas fharsainge air an cùlaibh, agus gum bi e a' toirt taic do dh'obair phàrlamaidich a tha nas fhiosraichte le fèin-fhios beatha.

### **Chi Kavindele**

Ceann, Sgioba Com-pàirteachaidh agus Choimhearsnachdan (PACT)  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Introduction

This briefing sets out key themes raised through the Participation and Communities Team's engagement with communities across Scotland.

PACT works across the Scottish Parliament to support meaningful public participation, with a particular focus on engaging people and communities whose voices are less often heard in parliamentary processes. This work contributes to the delivery of the Parliament's Public Engagement Strategy.

Through our Communities Approach, PACT works with community organisations, local groups and residents to understand lived experience in local communities and create opportunities for that insight to inform parliamentary scrutiny, legislation and engagement.



As part of this approach, the team visits all 32 local authority areas at least once a year to hear first hand about the issues communities are facing and the strengths they bring.

PACT provides a range of participation and engagement support, including:

- designing and delivering inclusive engagement to inform committee and parliamentary activity
- supporting MSPs and committees to involve people with lived experience in scrutiny
- building partnerships with community and third sector organisations across Scotland
- advising Parliament staff on accessible, trauma informed and ethical engagement practice
- feeding community insight back into parliamentary business and learning

This briefing draws together key themes emerging from PACT's community visits and is intended to support MSPs in understanding the current context facing communities across Scotland. It complements SPICe (Scottish Parliament Information Centre) research by adding community informed evidence grounded in lived experience.

This briefing is intended as an introduction to key community themes for Session 7 and to support continued dialogue between Parliament and Scotland's communities. If you would like to explore any of the themes in more detail or discuss opportunities for community participation in your parliamentary work, the PACT team would be very happy to support.

## PACT and the Communities Approach

The Participation and Communities Team (PACT) supports the Scottish Parliament to involve people with lived experience in scrutiny and decision making.

[PACT's Approach to Working with Communities](#) is rooted in the principles of a community development approach. The core features of this approach are as follows:

- Place based, community led engagement
- Proactive outreach to voices less often heard
- Trauma-informed and accessible participation
- Partnership with local organisations and anchor institutions
- Feedback and follow-through to build trust

Between 2025 and 2026, PACT aimed to visit all 32 local authority areas, meeting community organisations, volunteers and residents to understand local priorities, pressures and strengths.

At the time of writing, 29 of the 32 planned visits had been completed, with the remaining three due over the Summer of 2026.



The Participation and Communities Team (PACT)

## How this briefing was developed

The themes in this briefing are drawn from PACT's community visits across Scotland during 2025 to 2026. These visits involved conversations with community organisations, local groups, volunteers and residents about local priorities, pressures and strengths.

At the time of writing, 29 of the 32 planned local authority visits had been completed. This briefing identifies recurring themes emerging across those conversations. It is intended as a community informed briefing for MSPs and should be read as thematic insight rather than formal research or a comprehensive account of local conditions in every area.

Community organisations and local groups were identified through several routes, including recommendations from MSPs, existing PACT contacts and referrals, such as those developed through the [Regional Programme of Community Engagement that was part of the Scottish Parliament's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Programme](#), alongside desk research and contact with local Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs).

Where possible, PACT sought to prioritise grass roots organisations and groups with limited previous engagement with Parliament.

A list of the organisations that we worked with is available in Annex A. In many cases, such as TSI network meetings, only the TSI is listed, although numerous other organisations would have been present.



## Using this briefing

This briefing is intended to complement the format and purpose of SPICe Key Issues briefings. It provides:

- A high-level thematic overview of issues raised by communities
- Evidence drawn directly from conversations during PACT visits
- Context to support MSPs in scrutiny, legislation, and engagement

The themes are not presented in order of priority. They reflect recurring issues raised across Scotland at a particular point in time.



*Your Community Your Voice, Community Celebration*  
The Barony Centre, West Kilbride, 21 March 2026

# Key themes raised by communities

## 1. Funding Insecurity and Organisational Sustainability

Communities consistently highlighted the impact of:

- Short term, competitive funding cycles
- Limited access to core and infrastructure funding
- Rising costs without corresponding uplifts
- Disadvantage faced by small and grassroots organisations
- Complex, inconsistent and burdensome regulatory and commissioning systems acting as a barrier to delivery, particularly for small organisations.

Funding insecurity was one of the most consistently raised concerns about local services and community capacity.

## 2. Volunteer Fatigue and Workforce Pressures

Across urban, rural and island communities, PACT heard concerns about:

- Increasing reliance on a shrinking volunteer base
- Burnout among volunteers and paid staff
- Recruitment challenges, particularly in rural areas
- Loss of skills and leadership due to lack of succession planning

Many organisations described volunteer goodwill and staff capacity as under sustained strain.

## 3. Health, Mental Health and Social Care Pressures

Community feedback included:

- Long waiting times for NHS and mental health services
- Gaps in neurodiversity, dementia and preventative support
- Reduced capacity within Health and Social Care Partnerships
- Third sector organisations described absorbing unmet need.
- Participants in several areas described severe pressure in social care, including services being limited to critical need and reductions in care home capacity.
- Participants often linked reductions in preventative services to greater pressure elsewhere in the system over time.

## 4. Poverty, Cost of Living and Food Insecurity

PACT heard widespread evidence of:

- Increased demand for food banks and food projects
- Fuel poverty, especially in rural and island areas
- Transport and childcare costs acting as barriers to work
- Stigma preventing people from accessing support

- Participants from remote rural and island communities described persistent inequalities and raised concerns about the gap between legislative intent and lived experience.

Communities emphasised the importance of cash first and dignity based responses.

## **5. Transport, Rural Isolation and Access to Services**

Transport emerged as a cross cutting concern:

- Limited or unreliable public transport
- Cost and availability of fuel
- Restricted access to healthcare, education and employment
- Reliance on community transport to fill service gaps

Transport was frequently identified as a key factor affecting access to services, education and employment.

## **6. Housing, Place and Local Infrastructure**

Key issues included:

- Shortages of affordable housing
- Impact of depopulation on schools and services
- Perceived disconnect between planning decisions and local need
- Uneven distribution of economic benefit from development
- Limited access to affordable and secure community spaces and infrastructure, constraining delivery and growth
- Ongoing questions about how community generated data and insight will be used to inform decisions

Communities welcomed Local Place Plans and community ownership but reported resource and capacity constraints.

## **7. Children, Young People and Families**

Communities raised concerns about:

- Declining youth work and safe spaces
- Mental health pressures affecting children and young people
- Challenges faced by kinship and unpaid carers
- Limited and fragmented employment pathways for young people

Young people were often described as being consulted, but their views were not consistently embedded in decision making.

## 8. Inclusion, Equality and Community Safety

PACT heard recurring issues around:

- Racism, hate crime and polarisation
- Safety of minority ethnic, LGBTQ+ and refugee communities
- Participation fatigue among people with lived experience
- Need for consistent trauma informed engagement
- Participants raised concerns about increasing polarisation, extremism and hostility affecting community safety, participation and the operating environment for third sector organisations.

Trust was strongly linked to whether communities experienced visible change following engagement.

## 9. Community Ownership and Local Power

Positive practice was evident across Scotland, including:

- Community asset transfer creating resilient local hubs
- Community wealth building initiatives
- Strong local leadership and partnership working

However, communities often described these processes as slow, bureaucratic and risk averse, with limited transparency and limited influence over decisions, particularly in planning, funding and public service design.

## What communities want from Parliament

Across all local authority areas, communities consistently asked for:

- Longer term, flexible funding approaches
  - Recognition of lived experience as expertise
  - Meaningful roles for the third sector in decision making
  - Accessible and respectful engagement with follow up
  - Greater transparency about how input influences outcomes
- Stronger alignment between legislation and delivery, including concerns that existing laws are not always backed by consistent resourcing or enforcement

## Conclusion

Scotland's communities demonstrate resilience, creativity and commitment, but are operating under sustained pressure. While many of the issues raised are longstanding, their **cumulative impact** is becoming acute.

For Members of the Scottish Parliament, this briefing offers an evidence based snapshot of community priorities and an opportunity to ensure parliamentary scrutiny, legislation and engagement are informed by the experiences of people and communities across Scotland.

## Annex A: Community organisations engaged

Local Authority Area	Organisation(s)
1. Aberdeen City	Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO) Instant Neighbour North East Scotland Climate Action Network (NESCOAN)
2. Aberdeenshire	Scottish Rural Action Scotland's Community Tourism Network The Boatshed The Sail Loft The Salmon Bothy Stonehaven Town Partnership Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (AVA)
3. Angus	<i>Visit pending</i>
4. Argyll and Bute	Argyll TSI HomeStart Lorn Dove Centre
5. Clackmannanshire	Clackmannanshire TSI Forth Valley Sensory Centre Clackmannanshire Transformation Space Tullibody Development Trust and Heritage Centre Falkirk and Clacks Carers Centre
6. Dumfries and Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway TSI Third Sector Leaders Forum Anandale & Esdale Locality Hub Glenkens Hub New Galloway Community Enterprises Glenkens Community and Arts Trust Nithsdale Locality Hub
7. Dundee City	Dundee TSI Creative Dundee Feeling Strong

	<p>Hot Chocolate Trust</p> <p>SAMH Growing Chrysalis</p> <p>Dundee Printmakers</p>
8. East Ayrshire	<p>CVO East Ayrshire</p> <p>PEACE Childcare</p> <p>East Ayrshire Kinship Carers</p> <p>Community Open Gardens Shortlees</p> <p>Coalfield Community Transport</p> <p>GRAFT project</p> <p>Connect Call</p>
9. East Dunbartonshire	<p>East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action</p> <p>Glasgow Centre for Independent Living</p> <p>East Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau</p> <p>Group Recovery Aftercare Community Enterprise (GRACE)</p>
10. East Lothian	<p>Volunteer Centre East Lothian</p>
11. East Renfrewshire	<p>Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire</p> <p>MacMillan East Renfrewshire (Enjoy East Ren)</p> <p>Playlist for Life</p> <p>National Autistic Society (East Renfrewshire)</p> <p>The Black Door Shop</p> <p>Community Transport East Renfrewshire</p>
12. Edinburgh (City of Edinburgh)	<p>Whale Arts</p> <p>R Squared</p> <p>Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council (EVOC)</p> <p>Broomhouse Hub</p> <p>Volunteer Centre Edinburgh</p> <p>Active Inquiry</p> <p>Edinburgh Food Project</p> <p>The Association of Ukrainian in GB (AUGB)</p> <p>Pilmeny Development Group - Older People's Forum</p> <p>Space @ Broomhouse Hub</p>
13. Falkirk	<p>CVS Falkirk</p>

	RISE Forth Valley
14. Fife	Fife Voluntary Action Community Learning and Development (Fife Council) Fife Health and Social Care Partnership Fife Centre for Equalities
15. Glasgow City	Scottish Refugee Council West of Scotland Regional Equality Council Govan Community Project FARE Scotland Easterhouse Sports Centre FUUSE Youth Cafe
16. Highland	Highlands TSI Lochaber Hope Lochaber Environment Group Youth Highlands Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS) Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS)
17. Inverclyde	Inverclyde TSI CVS Inverclyde Inverclyde Foodbank Morton Community Mind Mosaic Compassionate Inverclyde Muirshiel Country Park Faith in Throughcare Women's Aid Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs Inverclyde Community Justice Forum Inverclyde Third Sector Leaders Forum
18. Midlothian	Midlothian Community Action (MCA)
19. Moray	Scottish Rural Action and Scotland's Community Tourism Network

	<p>TSI Moray</p> <p>The Lighthouse Group</p> <p>University of Highlands and Islands (Moray Campus)</p>
20. Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles)	<p>Third Sector Hebrides</p> <p>An Lanntair</p> <p>Advocacy Western Isles</p> <p>The Shed</p> <p>Volunteering Hebrides</p> <p>Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative</p> <p>Western Isles Community Care Forum</p> <p>Tarbert in Bloom</p> <p>Taigh Chearsabhaigh Arts Centre</p> <p>Ceann na h-airigh</p> <p>Cothrom</p> <p>Cobhair Bharraigh</p> <p>Cnoc Soilleir</p> <p>Garadh Bagh a Tuath</p> <p>Harris Voluntary Service</p> <p>Uist Council for Voluntary Organisations</p> <p>Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay</p> <p>Volunteer Centre Western Isles</p>
21. North Ayrshire	<p>Arran CVS</p> <p>Disability Arran</p> <p>Care on Arran Public Action Group</p> <p>Community of Arran Network meeting</p> <p>Lamlash Bowling Club</p> <p>Lamlash Community Hub/Project</p> <p>Whiting Bay Bowling Club</p> <p>Arran Eco Savvy</p> <p>Turning Point Scotland</p> <p>North Ayrshire</p> <p>Carers Group</p> <p>Whiting Bay Community Benefits Society</p> <p>1st Alliance Credit Union</p>

	<p>National Trust Scotland</p> <p>Friends of Kings Cross</p> <p>Disability Arran</p> <p>Arran Sound</p> <p>West Kilbride Community Initiative</p> <p>Creative Works</p> <p>Craft Town Scotland</p>
22. North Lanarkshire	<p>Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire (VANL)</p> <p>Lanarkshire Links</p> <p>Forgewood Co-op</p>
23. Orkney Islands	<p>Voluntary Action Orkney</p> <p>Orkney Third Sector Working Group</p> <p>Orkney Regional Inshore Fisheries Group</p> <p>Community Development Forum</p> <p>Orkney Dance and Fitness</p> <p>Orkney Community Learning and Development</p>
24. Perth and Kinross	<p>Third Sector Interface (Perth &amp; Kinross)</p> <p>PKAVS (Perth &amp; Kinross Association of Voluntary Service)</p> <p>The Walled Garden</p> <p>Wisecraft</p> <p>Blairgowrie and Rattray Initiative (BARI)</p> <p>Rattray Development Trust</p>
25. Renfrewshire	<p>Engage Renfrewshire</p> <p>Kairos Women+</p>
26. Scottish Borders	<p>Borders Voluntary Action</p> <p>Duns Fair Share</p> <p>Tweeddale Voluntary Action</p> <p>Kingmeadows Woodland Trust</p> <p>Village Halls event St Boswells</p>
27. Shetland Islands	<i>Visit pending</i>
28. South Ayrshire	<i>Visit pending</i>

29. South Lanarkshire	Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire (VASLAN) Healthy 'n' Happy
30. Stirling	Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise Inspiring Communities Fallin Community Voice
31. West Dunbartonshire	West Dunbartonshire CVS Dumbarton District Women's Aid West Dunbartonshire Climate Hub
32. West Lothian	Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian Broxburn United Sports Club