Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 7 March 2023

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Tuesday 7 March 2023

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
7th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)
*Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)
*Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP)
*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
*Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Kevin Anderson (South Ayrshire Council)
Shaw Anderson (Glasgow City Council)
Tom Arthur (Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth)
Evonne Bauer (East Dunbartonshire Council)
Michelle Crombie (Aberdeen City Council)
Dr Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh)
Lee Haxton (Perth and Kinross Council)
Jennifer Lees (North Lanarkshire Council)
Mark McAteer (Community Planning Improvement Board)
Susan McCardie (South Ayrshire Council)
James Messis (Scottish Government)
Bernadette Monaghan (Glasgow City Council)
Fiona Robertson (Perth and Kinross Council)
Anna Whelan (Orkney Islands Council)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Euan Donald

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 7 March 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Ariane Burgess): Good morning, and welcome to the seventh meeting in 2023 of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. I remind all members and witnesses to ensure that their devices are on silent and that notifications are turned off during the meeting.

Under agenda item 1, do members agree to take items 6 and 7 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Community Planning Inquiry (Post-legislative Scrutiny of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015)

09:01

The Convener: Under agenda item 2, the committee will take evidence from three panels of witnesses as part of our post-legislative scrutiny of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, in our community planning inquiry. This is the second evidence-taking session in the inquiry. We are looking at the impact of the 2015 act on community planning and how community planning partnerships respond to significant events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.

For our first panel of witnesses, we are joined in the room by Michelle Crombie, who is corporate strategy and community planning manager at Aberdeen City Council; Jennifer Lees, who is business partnership manager at North Lanarkshire Council; and Bernadette Monaghan, who is director of community empowerment and equalities at Glasgow City Council. We are joined online by Evonne Bauer, who is the executive officer fo place and community planning at East Dunbartonshire Council; and Shaw Anderson, who is partnership and development manager at Glasgow City Council. I warmly welcome our witnesses to the meeting.

We will try to direct our questions to specific witnesses to start with, where possible. When you would like to say something, please indicate that to me or the clerks. As Evonne Bauer and Shaw Anderson are appearing virtually, they should type the letter R in the chat function. We will then bring you in. There is no need to turn your microphones on and off, as we will do that for you.

Each committee member will explore a particular theme, and Annie Wells will start our discussion by asking some questions about the challenges that communities face.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Good morning. Last week, we heard that inequalities can be a moving target and that a lot has changed over the past eight years. What are the biggest challenges that your communities currently face? How do you prioritise the challenges and decide which ones the community planning partnership will tackle? As I am a Glasgow MSP, I put that question to Bernadette Monaghan first.

Bernadette Monaghan (Glasgow City Council): Thank you. Over the past few years in particular, communities have—obviously—dealt with the impacts of Covid. Some communities

mobilised really well, and organisations came together and really responded. In other communities, service provision simply shut down. We know that through our "Thriving places" locality planning model, which currently operates in 10 areas across the city. There was a mixed bag.

Many of our communities depend on local services such as libraries and community centres. Obviously, they were all impacted—they all closed down—so that lifeline was missing for many people. Some of our colleagues across the council family struggled to reopen a lot of those facilities with their budgets, for example, and we are still working our way through that. Communities felt that they were left without support in a lot of local provision. Libraries and community centres are hubs, so they are vital.

As you will know, we have a Glasgow community fund, and we fund a lot of the local, grass-roots community groups, community centres and community organisations through that. The demand for phase 2, which will start on 1 April, far outstripped the amount of funding that is available. The fund is a discretionary grant fund of £49 million and it is available over three years.

We will review what we have learned from phase 2. One thing that we will do is think through the purpose of the fund, the criteria and how we can best support local grass-roots organisations while ensuring that there are no gaps in local provision. As part of the assessment process, we had sector review panels, which gave us some really valuable feedback about geographies. That is important to us.

On the positive side, although the funding that we were able to give to organisations was not everything that they asked for, it is a three-year award. We do not have enough money to support the need, but we can offer flexibility for organisations that have been successful. They can use the award over three years and they can underspend in one year and overspend in another.

With limited resources, we are doing our best to try to ensure that we support as many community organisations and services for local people as possible.

Shaw Anderson (Glasgow City Council): One of the things that we have tried hard to do is to build the capacity of our communities. That is consistent with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. We look to equip our communities with the information and data that they need so that they can influence the decisions that we make.

At that point, people tend to think primarily, although not exclusively, about money. However, through the approach that we have taken with our decentralised multimember ward structures, we are keen to empower our citizens to influence the way that we provide services. That will not happen overnight, but we believe that we are well down that route, which is consistent with the 2015 act.

All that we do is targeted to try to address the entrenched problems that we have with poverty and inequality in Glasgow. That is our focus. We were allocated £23 million in the previous financial year—£1 million across each of our multimember wards—and the intention has been and will be that our communities will more directly influence how that money is spent in them, because they know what they need better than we officials do.

That is one of the key things that we are trying to do. It is also consistent with something that Glasgow City Council is involved in—open government, which is an international approach to trying to make things more democratic. The strand of that for which Bernadette Monaghan and I have responsibility is participatory democracy. That is not a phrase that runs easily off the tongue with a west of Scotland accent, but it is another key strand.

I hope that that is helpful. I will be happy to answer any questions that it might have generated.

Annie Wells: I will move on and ask my next question, which Shaw Anderson has touched on. The 2015 act places a duty on community planning partnerships to tackle socioeconomic inequalities. To what extent can CPPs and their partners tackle the causes of those inequalities and not just deal with the consequences? For a different angle, I ask Michelle Crombie to comment so that we can find out what is happening in Aberdeen.

Michelle Crombie (Aberdeen City Council): Thank you for the question. CPPs are critical in tackling the underlying causes of socioeconomic disadvantage. In fact, that is where there is a space in which they can support the more preventative approach.

Communities are good at galvanising and coming together. They were amazing during the pandemic and they are amazing even now, during the cost of living crisis. We have really been able to nurture our relationships with them during this time. Over the past few years, there has been a sense that that has been community planning for real, or that it is what community planning should be. However, that crisis response does not allow us to prevent the disadvantage and inequality from happening, so we have to work as a partnership across all services.

In Aberdeen, we analyse our planned improvement activity as part of our local outcome improvement plan and our locality plans in terms of three tiers of prevention—upstream, midstream

and downstream—so that we always have a balance. Following the pandemic, we added a new priority outcome to our local outcome improvement plan: to reduce suffering that is caused by poverty. We did that in recognition that we had to respond in the short term. However, the rest of our 15 priority stretch outcomes are about prevention, and there are various tiers of activity that vary in their effectiveness for that. We always have our eye on the longer-term goal, which is to try to prevent inequalities.

The Convener: We move on to questions from Mark Griffin, who joins us online.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): How have community planning partnerships helped marginalised and disempowered communities to build capacity and confidence to challenge or influence decision making so that they can engage fully in the community planning process? Are communities, particularly those that are marginalised or disadvantaged, aware that community planning partnerships exist?

Evonne Bauer (East Dunbartonshire Council): We use our Scottish index of multiple deprivation data, as well as the work that has been done in our locality plans and our LOIP, to identify challenges. We are a small local authority and we are very much engaged in capacity building and working with our communities, particularly those in the locality areas. We use a community learning and development approach, and we join up with and work with our partners in the health and social care partnership and the third sector.

For us, it is all about access to services, empowerment, learning from people with lived experience and building on their experiences. We have boosted our community grant scheme for 2023-24 and we are working with our communities to make sure that they have the ability to apply for those grants, which will help them to build capacity in their areas.

Jennifer Lees (North Lanarkshire Council): In North Lanarkshire Council, we have established a community board development portal. We have nine community boards across North Lanarkshire. Eight of them are based around our towns, and the ninth board, which is for the northern corridor, encompasses the villages that straddle the M80.

The community board development programme was custom written and developed based on a training needs analysis that we did with our community board members. At a practical level, it includes modules such as training on what being a community board representative involves and how to chair a meeting. It also looks at different partner agencies and their responsibilities as well as participatory budgeting, finance, meeting skills and so on.

Mr Griffin asked how we engage with communities who may not even know that community planning partnerships exist. It is important for all of us who work in local areas and with local people to identify touch points when we are working with people, whether they are in schools or in our health centres. That will give us opportunities to find out what matters most to communities and how we as community planning partners can, to use Michelle Crombie's word, galvanise around the local issues that matter the most to local people.

Bernadette Monaghan: We work with a wide range of partners. Our community council collective is vocal and it is working to help to shape what our new citizen engagement framework for the 23 area partnerships that Shaw Anderson spoke about will look like.

We have contact with our third sector colleagues and we are working on a better relationships implementation group, which will be made up of council family members and third sector leaders. That will produce an action plan, which we will sign up to jointly, to shape how we work together. That work came on the back of the move from our previous grant fund to the new Glasgow communities fund and the learning that came with that. We have disabled communities workstreams that came from our social recovery task force, and we have the Glasgow equalities working group and the black and minority ethnic task group.

09:15

Mark Griffin's question is a good one. How do we get beyond the third sector networks, community groups and community councils that we already have and reach people who have not had the opportunity to engage? That is what we aim to do through the new citizen engagement approach. We are working with our colleagues in the Centre for Civic Innovation and the neighbourhoods, regeneration and sustainability team. We are trying to put in place something that will give as many local people as possible the opportunity to engage through our area partnerships and to make initial decisions around the new £23 million neighbourhood infrastructure improvement fund that Shaw Anderson mentioned.

We do not want it to be only the people who turn up to an area partnership meeting who have the opportunity to make decisions on how local devolved budgets are spent and resources are targeted. We want to go beyond that. We aim to have our framework in place by June and to test it out in the three pilot areas where we ran the original participatory budgeting pilots. We will then roll it out beyond that. We can come back to the

committee with information on our progress on that at the appropriate time.

The Convener: Thank you for that.

Shaw Anderson: Mark Griffin's question is a pointed and important one. There is not much point in our having lots of colourful documents and big strategies if they are not relevant to our communities. One of my colleagues used the expression "touch points". We are seeking touch points where we can get up close and personal with our communities, where it is relevant for our communities to engage with us. In saying "relevant", I mean that they will have an opportunity to influence and shape what we do.

I will give an example. On Saturday past, 51 community councillors gave up their Saturday morning to meet council officers to consider housing and planning issues. It is a statement in itself that that many people would give up their Saturday morning to work—unpaid—with us.

We respond to requests for locality plans. We are very active in the Castlemilk community of Glasgow just now. We are responding to the community, which said to us that it was not engaging effectively with Glasgow City Council and that it felt that we had let the community down in relation to matters pertaining to the local supermarket and transport. We have a team that is working with local elected members, community councillors and other community activists to try to address those issues.

The point is well made. If we are not relevant to our communities and they do not think that there is any point in engaging with us, all that we will have are strategies and documents. I believe that we are doing a great deal, but there is a need to do much more.

In many ways, the legislation was significantly interrupted by Covid. Many of our community councils almost stood down as a result of Covid because they were not digitally equipped to continue. Covid led to a big pause. It provided both challenges and opportunities.

That was a bit of a long-winded answer. We need to do more, but we are already doing a great deal to engage effectively with our communities. Engagement is effective when it changes things. We are doing quite a lot in that regard. However, one of the outcomes of the inquiry might be that we get a better focus on that and greater clarity so that we can learn from one another.

Mark Griffin: My second question is for Bernadette Monaghan. We heard from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights that CPPs may be "race-blind" when it comes to tackling inequalities. What do you do in practice to ensure that fall communities, including communities of interest and identity, get their voices heard in community planning?

Bernadette Monaghan: We work closely with CRER through our Glasgow equalities working group. At our last meeting, CRER talked us through its submission, which is very fair.

There could be more of an equalities focus in place-based work. We will factor that into the strategic appraisal of our current locality planning model with a view to refreshing it or developing a new model. That model started back in 2013, so it predates the community empowerment legislation. The point about having more of an equalities focus is a valid one.

When we look at the framework for citizen engagement, we need to ensure that it reflects the demographics in a particular community and that that is borne out in the people who engage. We work closely with CRER on that. It has looked at the performance management framework that we are developing for a new community action plan, and I think that it felt that it was very bottom up. We have data from a lot of our partners that we can use to give us an indication of which direction we are going in.

When we had a social recovery task force, we looked at the themes that came out from an initial discussion with all the partners, and equalities very much featured in that. We therefore assigned work to particular existing community planning groups and structures, including to the equalities working group and our BME task group. All those workstreams focused on a framework of 10 questions that we gave them. We also had an academic advisory group, which we have now formally made part of the community planning structure. That work was to allow them to set priorities going forward.

We had really good information from that academic group, which initially involved the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health. It did some micro briefings for us about the disproportionate impact of Covid on BME communities, women and disabled people. We are working very closely with it to look not only at the disproportionate impact of Covid but at the disproportionate impact on BME communities of hate crime and poverty.

We will take forward all those things and factor those into our review of the current locality planning model. As I said, we have regular engagement with CRER through our Glasgow equalities working group as well.

The Convener: Is that you finished, Mark?

Mark Griffin: Yes, I am finished, convener. Thank you.

The Convener: We will now move on to the theme of the role of the third sector, on which Paul McLennan has questions.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): My questions are on the role of the third sector. I chair the cross-party group on social enterprise, so I have quite a lot of interaction with the third sector. It is fair to say that third sector organisations across the country had mixed views on their involvement in community planning not only at the local authority level but down at the locality planning level. I know that there will be questions on locality plans later.

What are your thoughts on and experiences of that? How do you involve third sector organisations? How could things be improved across the country? As I said, the signal from the third sector was very mixed in that regard.

I will go to Jennifer Lees first and then open up the discussion to anyone else who wants to come in.

Jennifer Lees: Our third sector interface, Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire, is represented on our strategic leadership board as a community planning partnership, as is the community and voluntary sector partnership, which is an umbrella organisation for various community groups across North Lanarkshire. Both are full strategic leadership board community planning partnership members. We rely heavily on Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire.

Paul McLennan: Is that the TSI?

Jennifer Lees: Yes, VANL is the TSI.

The council provides funding of £191,000 a year. We provide revenue funding, and NHS Lanarkshire also provides funding.

VANL acts as the community development support, so it will encourage, facilitate and support community groups and individuals to become involved in the local community boards and wider community activity. It also manages our community solutions programme, with funding of £1.1 million a year from the health and social care programme. The community solutions programme is designed, as the name suggests, to provide support for people who have mental health issues or people who are disabled in the local community, and to allow and enable them to play a full and active part in the community. A number of social enterprises are funded through the community solutions budget.

VANL is also involved in helping to assess our community grant funding applications. It sits on the panel.

I know from reading some of the other submissions to the committee that the experience of TSIs is mixed, but we in North Lanarkshire have a productive relationship.

Paul McLennan: Does Michelle Crombie have any comments in that regard from an Aberdeen point of view? One key question for me is how you build that capacity. There are the TSIs and there is the third sector below that, but how do you build capacity within the sector for it to try to develop itself, not just its core actions? How does it develop itself in community planning roles, for example?

Michelle Crombie: Our position is very similar to that in North Lanarkshire, which Jennifer Lees has explained.

To answer your query, there are three things that I will pull out. Our TSI is a core member of our community planning partnership. In respect of building capacity, it is a co-chair of our community empowerment group, which supports communities to thrive and be empowered to take forward action in the community. The TSI has taken a leadership role in that.

On involvement in our community planning improvement activity, it is quite unique that the TSI in Aberdeen has been critical in our support of communities to become upskilled in quality improvement. That is a tool that we use in Aberdeen to understand what impact we are having. Our TSI has had that role in working with third sector organisations, so that they feel more confident because they have been upskilled to operate in that environment.

A third example of the unique relationship in Aberdeen is our joint work with business partners in the city. We are trying to encourage businesses to get involved in our improvement activity and to get them to understand the impact that they can have on, and the support that they can give, to communities.

Those are the three areas in which, I think, we are very strong in working with the third sector in the city.

Paul McLennan: I turn to Bernadette Monaghan and Shaw Anderson for Glasgow City Council's point of view. One of the key issues is how to improve public outcomes through community planning, the TSIs or the third sector. I think that you have touched on that. How do you engage in that side of things?

I go back to Michelle Crombie's point. It is about trying to make the community aware of where improvement needs to be, what it needs to do and how it plays a role, for example. Does Bernadette Monaghan or Shaw Anderson want to touch on that particular element, working with the third sector, and delivering on the ground?

Bernadette Monaghan: As colleagues have said, we have third sector representation in all our community planning structures—in the strategic partnership, which is chaired by our political lead; in the executive group, which I chair; and on our public health oversight board and other groups that report in to community planning. We have third sector—

Paul McLennan: It is about trying to flip it round to the communities themselves, not so much at the community planning level but down at the grass roots, if you know what I mean. It is about saying, "Okay. As a community, we know that we need to improve this, and this is what a third sector organisation needs to do, working with community planning above that." We have talked about local outcomes improvement plans. How do things flow from the community planning, talk-in-the-office level down to the local community? That is the key point for me.

Bernadette Monaghan: I hope that this answers at least part of your question. We fund a range of third sector partners, and we have a third sector capacity-building working group. We fund Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector, the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations Scotland, Volunteer Glasgow and Community Enterprise in Scotland. That is the core group, and it is critical at the moment.

A lot of organisations that applied to the Glasgow communities fund asked for more money than they received. Some organisations that have had funding for the past three years will not have been successful this year. Unfortunately, that has nothing to do with the quality of the applications, which were of an incredibly high standard. There was simply a very competitive process, and we did not have enough funds for everything. We had to come up with a formula to make the best use of the resources that we have.

We rely on our capacity-building partners in particular to provide grass-roots support. We also have the people make Glasgow communities programme, which aims to go beyond asset transfer. That does not necessarily mean that people will go down the road of ownership. I think that we have had around 556 expressions of interest so far. A lot of that is about local organisations looking for premises—a community centre, for example—to take on and run. There is a five-stage process.

09:30

One of the challenges, of course, is that utilities costs are going up and staff salaries need to increase. Funding is not always available, so it is about working through points with all our partners. We need to think about trying not to set up an organisation to fail if it takes on an asset but, rather, how we can support the organisation to ensure that it makes a success of taking on that asset. That programme is much more flexible than the community asset transfer approach, but there are undoubtedly challenges.

The Glasgow communities fund is a discretionary grant fund. It is the council's money, and it could be argued that the council does not have to put it out the door, but we depend on the third sector to reach grass-roots organisations and to provide local community grass-roots services for a range of very vulnerable people that the council simply could not provide. It would be a big mistake to think that we do not need to fund the third sector as a strong and equal partner, because we do.

We should also recognise that the third sector brings a lot of resource into the city. It is not just about the money that we provide. A huge amount of money comes in. We have regular discussions with our colleagues in the National Lottery Community Fund and the Robertson Trust, for example, about where there are gaps and what we can fund. We have conversations about where they might want to put resources as well.

I do not know whether that answers your question. There is a whole mixture—

Paul McLennan: That is spot-on—it is exactly what I was looking for. We get feedback from people who come to the cross-party group on social enterprise that Glasgow City Council is very supportive. The key thing is that the support infrastructure is there for organisations for funding and to help them to adapt and change if they are not successful. That response is really helpful.

Shaw Anderson or Evonne Bauer might want to come in on that. I have only one question.

The Convener: I know, but we must move on, in the interests of time.

If other folks want to come in and they get the mic, they can chuck in answers then. I am sorry about that—we have quite a bit more to get on with.

I will move on to local outcome improvement plans and locality plans. Some of you have touched on plans as you have answered previous questions; I am interested to hear what processes community planning partnerships follow in developing LOIPs and locality plans. Also, will you do things differently in developing new or refreshed plans? I direct the question initially to Evonne Bauer.

Evonne Bauer: We are currently finalising the refresh of our locality plans for our four most deprived areas in East Dunbartonshire. That has involved a consultation and engagement process

with all our community planning partners and the community, which has spanned the period since the middle of 2022, in order that we reflect the cost of living and the recovery from the pandemic.

That process has involved engagement, including with focus groups that we called "blether boxes". Our community development workers were working with development workers from East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action and from the HSCP—it was all hands on deck. We have also had face-to-face workshops with partners to test the themes, so we are making quite good progress on the locality plans.

The refresh of our LOIP will come from that process. It will happen later this year, we hope, and will reflect where we are. We have also had quite an extensive budget consultation exercise for the 2023-24 budget, which has brought out priorities. Those will also be at the core of the LOIP. In the background, we are looking at Scottish index of multiple deprivation data, at a strategic needs assessment and at our governance around the CPP framework.

The Convener: Thanks. Shaw Anderson, would you like to speak about the methods and processes in your community planning partnership for developing LOIPs and locality plans?

Shaw Anderson: I will defer to my director on that. I will do a brief intro then hand over to Bernadette Monaghan, who is probably better placed than I am to answer that question.

Suffice it to say that the refresh that is under way has been heavily, and correctly, influenced by the social recovery task force, which was set up in response to the pandemic. We are in the midst of a refresh and are adapting our performance management framework.

It is probably more appropriate for Bernadette Monaghan to answer on the detail of day-to-day operation. I apologise if I have just given my director a hospital pass—although I do not think that I have.

Bernadette Monaghan: Our existing locality planning model, the "Thriving places" programme, started in 2013 and was a 10-year commitment. It is largely a partnership between Glasgow City Council and the health and social care partnership. Between us, we fund a community connector post that is usually hosted by an anchor organisation. Areas are all different and there have been different experiences in each. We did an evaluation a while ago with What Works Scotland, which felt that we needed qualitative information and stories about the impact that the programme might be having at the local level.

It is fair to say that, because of Covid, things have not progressed in some areas and have built up a head of steam in others. The model was set up as a local one. The commitment was to 10 areas; as we know, there are other Scottish index of multiple deprivation areas in Glasgow where locality planning is needed. Participation requests are one route whereby that is happening.

There have also been quite a few new developments that we want to take on board. One is the new model for area partnerships, which used to be area committees and, when they became area partnerships, received reports. We are moving away from that. We have reshaped the area partnerships and our sector partnerships. The partnerships will still exist in the three sectors; they will not meet four times a year, but will come together twice a year and will focus on learning and sharing information and practice around common themes.

The local area partnerships will be responsible for producing local area action plans. Those will not displace work that has already gone on through the "Thriving places" programme, which is happening in the neighbourhoods regeneration and sustainability side of the council, where we have the local planners and local development frameworks, or the work that is going on through Glasgow Life, which has a locality planning team that works closely with our area partnerships.

In addition to those recent developments, we have had the report of the place commission, which is independent and considered in particular the impact of place on health and wellbeing. Through the strategic appraisal that I have talked about, we want to take what we have learned so far, consider what resources we have and what is going on across the council family and create a locality planning model that brings all that together.

It is not just about our responsibilities under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; it is about what place-based work is happening across the council family, how we bring it together and how we learn from, and take into that new model the positive factors of our current locality planning approach.

That is where we are. We have a model that is effective in the areas where it is used, but there is a gap between the areas where locality planning is happening and those where it is not. The question is about how we move beyond that and address locality planning in all areas of need across the city.

The Convener: I had two questions but will ask just one because of time. I will direct it to Michelle Crombie.

Last week, the Accounts Commission stated that a number of partnerships have not published locality plans despite being required to do so by

the 2015 act. How have locality plans worked in your area and how has your CPP targeted interventions at the areas that need most assistance? You have touched on that, but will you elaborate?

Michelle Crombie: We have published locality plans. We refreshed them in 2021 in parallel with our local outcome improvement plan. We undertake a population needs assessment and use it as the foundation of our LOIP and locality plan development processes. We look at a range of data to identify where it points to priority need. The development process is about engaging with partners and communities on the ground.

In 2021, from learning from the 2015 act and where we were with locality planning, we changed our approach and found that our landscape was cluttered. As a CPP, we were meeting our locality planning duties, but at the same time our health and social care partnership was implementing its own locality planning model—it was the same, but different—with other groups involved. As a result, communities were becoming confused about what locality planning actually was.

Therefore, in 2020, we undertook a review to develop an integrated model, which I think is the only one in Scotland. At the time, we did some benchmarking to find out whether other council areas were having the same issues with their locality planning, and our understanding was that they were. We have therefore taken the bold step of developing across the CPP an integrated locality planning team, which is being facilitated by council officers and the health and social care partnership, and we now have joint locality plans that seek to meet the duties under the community empowerment and integration joint boards legislation.

Those plans cross the whole of the city, but they also identify priority areas of need for specific communities. We are trying to have a much stronger connection with those locality plans and partner organisations, because what we found before was that there was a bit of a split, with partner staff involved in the strategic outcome improvement groups and communities addressing the same issues but in their own areas. It was all just a bit fragmented.

We did that in 2021, but we are still experiencing some teething issues. The pandemic did not help, because it disrupted our groups, and there have been some resource issues with regard to locality planning. However, we are very much committed to the model and to overcoming those resource issues. Communities are just looking for support and for us to be working with them jointly on addressing their priority needs, and they want to see that reflected in the core master locality plans. We are in a good place, but there are definitely areas for improvement.

The Convener: Thanks for that response.

It seems, from the three LOIPs and locality plans that I have heard about, that the process is a living, breathing one that you are very much keen to engage with and really make work. It is not something that was just handed out after the 2015 act—it is something that you really want to keep alive.

Our next theme, which is on measuring impact, will be introduced by Marie McNair.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Good morning, panel.

Last week, the Accounts Commission stated that it is still difficult for CPPs to demonstrate what impact they are having. Does local data allow CPPs to demonstrate the impact of their decisions and actions on inequality levels and other outcomes? I will pop that question to Shaw Anderson, first of all.

Shaw Anderson: The key word is "attribution": how do we attribute what, and to which structures or mechanisms? I think that we can demonstrate that. In many ways you have begun to answer your own question, because it is the local data that will inform all this.

This will sound as if I am going off message—I do not think that I am—but one of our key frustrations is that the macroeconomic situation can impact on what we are doing. We might well be doing the right things in our own locality or in the city of Glasgow, but the stats might indicate that we are failing.

I can illustrate that by pointing to the macroeconomic influences on, for example, child poverty. I believe that what we in Glasgow have done on child poverty has been quite innovative; it has been driven with purpose and clarity of focus. However, if you look at the cold high-level stats, you will see that they are almost all going the wrong way, despite what we are doing.

As far as impact is concerned, therefore, the key word for me is, as I have said, attribution. Are we doing the right things? Are we establishing and forming the correct meaningful working relationships across partnerships and with our communities and third sector partners? In many ways, we are.

It is fiendishly difficult to attribute to specific activities, actions or even legislation what is changing things for the better. That might sound like a cop-out, but I think that I can justify saying it.

09:45

I am a great believer in the idea that, if you cannot measure something, you cannot manage it, and if you cannot manage it, you should not be doing it. We need hard facts and figures, but it is very complex to find out exactly which mechanism, or what behaviour or piece of legislation, is having the biggest impact. We come closest to getting meaningful answers when we look as locally as possible and in the most granular way possible. For example, we can look at what the impact is on the ground. Are the day-to-day lives of our citizens being impacted positively? Are they better off and do they have more cash in their hands? Do they have access to better services in a meaningful way?

I am not certain that that is a direct answer. Personally, I have constantly struggled with the issues of attribution and impact, and how we can be clear about what is making the best impact. We can point to trends and activities, but it is difficult to give empirical evidence, so I would probably defer to academic colleagues on that.

I hope that that answers the question in some way.

Marie McNair: Thank you; it does.

In the interests of time, I will move on to my next question—

The Convener: Michelle Crombie has indicated that she wants to come in.

Marie McNair: I am sorry, Michelle. Do you want to come in before I move on?

Michelle Crombie: Yes. I just want to sympathise with Shaw Anderson and agree that attribution can be difficult. As I mentioned, in Aberdeen we use the quality improvement approach, which has changed our approach to how we use data to understand impact. That is absolutely critical; there is so much data, and if you just look at trends, we can get lost in that sea of data and wonder what difference we are making.

Using the fundamental principles of quality improvement, we set out in our local outcomes improvement plan our 15 stretch outcomes, which identify exactly how much we want to improve and by when. We then break down those high-level longer-term stretch outcomes into specific improvement projects, with the same aims. Those are the projects that we believe will allow us to achieve our priority outcomes.

Up to this point, we have achieved five of the stretch outcomes that we set in 2016. They are ambitious stretch outcomes, but we can point to the things that we have done that we believe have made a difference, and the things that have not

made a difference and where we have had to change tack. Data has been fundamental to that, as has involving communities in the improvement work. Therefore, we are quite confident that we can understand the impact that we are having. That does not mean that we have cracked it, because the issues are complex, but we have some confidence to keep pushing forward and will make a difference where we can.

Jennifer Lees: Very briefly, I note that in addition to the quantitative data, it is important that we use case studies and examples of feedback from community organisations and local areas where we have worked. That does not always lend itself to numeric indicators, but it is equally important feedback on where we are improving outcomes.

Marie McNair: My second question has been covered, so I will hand back to the convener. Thank you.

The Convener: We will move on to our sixth theme, which is the culture of public bodies. Miles Briggs is leading on that.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Good morning, panel, and thank you for joining us. The written submission from Aberdeen City Council states that the community planning partnership has

"secured the commitment of partners to divert resources"

for shared priorities. Have other community planning partnerships had that experience? How has that collaborative working under the 2015 act taken place? I mentioned Aberdeen, so I ask Michelle Crombie to give more information on how that has worked.

Michelle Crombie: We have a commitment to our local outcomes improvement plan and the specific improvement projects that I referred to. Partners take a lead on a project, and we then bring partner colleagues together. We certainly have the commitment of partners. The 2015 act places an equal duty on partners, but that does not necessarily result in equal contributions of resources; there is variation among partners. The issue is largely about identifying priority areas, seeking partners' involvement and ensuring that they know what they are being asked to lead on.

Miles Briggs: That is helpful. One of my concerns about where the 2015 act has not really made progress is that it outlines a process but not necessarily an outcome for people to focus on. How could the act be improved to empower communities and get them the outcome that they all want, rather than the process stopping that sometimes?

Bernadette Monaghan: I am thinking about how we work with other public bodies and partners. One question in the inquiry response

was about whether we have achieved shared leadership, and it is fair to say that the council is probably the dominant partner in that, but we have changed the way we work, particularly on our executive group. We now say to our partners, "Please set the agenda. If you have challenges and issues, bring them to the table. Use the collective experience and knowledge that you have around the community planning table to help move things forward." That is working, and it has been really good. We know that there will be conversations and follow-up off table, and we can then pick up on that at future community planning meetings.

We have shared resources in kind in that we have local authority liaison officers in our team from both Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and we work closely with them. We have individual meetings with them, and indeed, we are looking at bringing together a range of public bodies. I suppose that that is to take a more inward focus, but it is about asking how we can make more effective use of our own resources and buildings and work more collaboratively, especially given the budget pressures. That work is starting.

There are also other examples of really good collaboration. For instance, the police are a key player in our public health oversight board, and they have reshaped the approach that they take to policing and solving issues. They see issues through a public health lens and can see how that approach and working with a greater number of partners can help them to achieve much more effective outcomes, so that is working particularly well. Our gambling harms group is very much focused on lived experience and what that tells us. There are resources from partners but not necessarily money, as it were; it is more about how we work collaboratively with partners and how we do things differently.

We have other examples of really good partnerships. Glasgow Life has a live well community referral scheme that involves working with partner agencies. It is in one ward at the moment and is due to be rolled out.

We have Glasgow Helps, which is a helpline that was set up within a few days of the start of the pandemic. Initially, it was a partnership between the council, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the health and social care partnership and Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector, but we have now tried to test that model by scaling it up to see whether we can use it as a way of ensuring that people get the right service at the right time, rather than having to navigate their way through various council departments. We are testing that to see whether it works and how it might go forward.

The community learning and development action plan is closely related to our community action plan, and it is built into the community planning partnership's work as well, so there are a lot of examples of good collaboration.

I am not quite sure that I have answered that question in terms of resources. We are making a conscious effort to facilitate the community planning executive group, but we are not setting the agenda. We are saying to partners, "This is for you to bring your challenges to the table and collectively find a way that we can move forward on those challenges." That has worked quite well. It is obviously still a work in progress, but it is working well.

We are finding that partners are sharing data on what they are achieving with us a lot more, and that is helping us to build a much more comprehensive performance management framework, from the bottom up, to show where trends are going in a positive direction and where they are going in a negative direction.

It is all a work in progress, but it feels like we have moved a long way from the council being the dominant partner, setting the agenda, bringing papers and potentially recycling those papers round all our community planning structures. It feels more proactive.

Jennifer Lees: I just want to reinforce what Bernadette Monaghan has been saying. North Lanarkshire Council has an annual programme of work that sets out how we will deliver "The Plan for North Lanarkshire", which is our overarching LOIP, and 80 per cent of the actions in that programme of work are delivered in partnership. Therefore, this is not about additional resources; it is about partners looking at the issues and seeing where they can contribute to and support that work with existing resources and by doing things differently. Indeed, that approach was evidenced in a piece of work that police, housing and social work did in Craigneuk on antisocial behaviour and drug feuds in the local scheme.

Miles Briggs: Is that final bit of resource the main challenge to shared leadership? I know that there are resources for administration and support services, but there is also the cost of delivering an outcome. I note that, in its submission, Glasgow City Council states that the local authority remains the dominant partner in its CPP, so is it that final financial barrier that is stopping some of these projects moving forward? What you have said suggests that it is nothing to do with being willing to let communities take these things forward.

Shaw Anderson: It is, in part, a capacity issue. After all, the two really big structures around the table are health and the council.

Perhaps I can compartmentalise this into two things. First, we remain quite weak in our joint approaches to big chunky structural bits of capital investment. This might be a controversial view, but I am not convinced that we are very good at that.

However, on the more operational day-to-day service design side of things, the allocation of staff time to common purpose and so on, our synergy approach is, I think, pretty strong. It is perhaps not surprising that councils become first among equals, given their capacity and reach. In many ways, what I was going to say has already been said by Bernadette Monaghan and Jennifer Lees, but a really good example that I refer people to is the activities of Police Scotland colleagues on our public health oversight board. The local chief superintendent realised the impact of mental health issues on his ability to deliver a police service. It might be almost counterintuitive for the police to lead on an issue such as mental health, but I think that the fruit of community planning is having that better understanding of what everyone does and identifying that collaboration and partnership space. The police play a key role in this work in the public health approach that they are taking to policing.

Just to compartmentalise this, then, I think that we are weak on the capital investment side of things and the big structural financial decisions that we sometimes make—and I could give you some examples of that in the past—but we are strong on some of the operational aspects. I hope that that answer helps.

Miles Briggs: Thanks for that. Jennifer, did you want to come in?

Jennifer Lees: Shaw Anderson has covered the point that I was going to make.

Miles Briggs: No worries. Thank you.

The Convener: Our last theme is on national and local leadership.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): We have just been talking a little bit about leadership, and I would like to develop and get your views on that issue. For a number of weeks now, we have been taking evidence from a number of partners, and I would say that they have presented a mixed picture of the success of community planning in their locales. The issue that they put their finger on was local leadership and the determination, innovation and so on required to drive this stuff forward. It is not about structures, plans and documents but about doing things that the communities want to have done, and they focused on the issue of leadership in that respect. What are your views on that? Do you recognise that as being important? Do you see it in your own authorities, and what can we do to take this

forward and ensure that we really deliver the leadership that we need?

Jennifer Lees: As I have said, in 2018 we had the community planning local outcome improvement plan and the council had its own business plan. The council and the partners then came together to produce and adopt "The Plan for North Lanarkshire" as our single overarching plan, and that provides our strategic direction.

In September 2019, our strategic leadership board had a development day. It examined the community planning board, which had grown in size and involved all the statutory members attending more or less all the meetings, which meant that, often, we had 26 or 30 people in the community planning boardroom. We also had different faces, so we did not have a level of consistency and did not know one another when we were sitting round the table.

10:00

We recognised that partnership working was taking place at the level below through our children's services partnership, our community justice partnership and our tackling poverty officers group and we decided to let those community partnership working arrangements— that is what they are—concentrate on their thematic issues, be that poverty, climate change or children's services, and to have the community planning partnership board become a strategic leadership board, similar to the model in Aberdeen and Glasgow. That strategic leadership board is comprised of police, fire and health services, the health and social care partnership, the voluntary sector, Scottish Enterprise and the council. Eight organisations are represented on it. That might not sound like many, but remember that Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency are involved in the level below in partnership working.

The strategic leadership board provides clear, strategic, decisive leadership. Pieces of work come to us not only for reporting, accountability and oversight but when there is a hurdle that needs to be overcome or when a bit of strategic direction and leadership needs to be given. There is real trust and experience of working together between the strategic leaders. That was heightened through Covid when they all served on the local resilience partnership, so they have the ability to work together at pace and at scale.

Our strategic leadership board is chaired by Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provides the vice-chair.

Willie Coffey: Are there other views on that? I am particularly interested in leadership at the local level to drive a lot of the initiatives that come

forward. We learned about some great experiences that emerged because of Covid and that communities feel are the things that they should be doing now, not the things that they were doing as part of the CPP process prior to that. It was a surprise to many of us that they wanted to keep that. Local people were driving that with support from councillors, officials and others. Do you see that happening in Glasgow and in Aberdeen?

Bernadette Monaghan: At the level at which Shaw Anderson and I work—the community planning executive group, which is operational—it largely depends on relationships with key partners. There is more turnover in some key partners than in others, but we regularly meet individually with all the partners around that table. For instance, I regularly meet the chief executive of GCVS and we have those conversations. We facilitate the executive group meeting and I chair it, but that is not the be-all and end-all. The work largely happens off table as well.

On strategic leadership, we have the strategic partnership, which is the policy-making bit of our community planning structures. That is chaired by our political lead, Councillor Christina Cannon, so it has elected member representation on it, as well as all the statutory and third sector partners. That is about setting the policy and direction.

Our social recovery task force ran from about July 2020 until the end of January 2022. It was agreed with the strategic partnership that the work of that task force would fold into that of the partnership. The work now is oversight of the development of the new community action plan. Basically, all the work streams that were part of that task force will come to the strategic partnership on a rolling programme and report on what they are doing on the priorities that they set out. Those were priorities on which we asked them to think about what they could do that would be impactful and make a difference. They report into the policy making part of our structures, which works well.

The academic advisory group has been expanded. It now includes all the universities in the city and has a formal locus as a sub-group of the strategic partnership. We want to use what the evidence tells us to set priorities and move forward. We know, for instance, that various academics are engaging with people at different levels in the council around child poverty. We want to unpick that a bit and perhaps have some sort of workshop or event around how we really shift the dial on child poverty. Obviously, that is a top strategic priority for the council in the new council strategic plan.

We work in various ways but, as you were saying, the strategic partnership, largely, is the policy-making arm, and then that comes to the executive group, which is more operational. Our job is to go in and make sure that the work happens and report back on how we deliver on that.

Willie Coffey: Thank you for that. Michelle or Evonne, do you have different perspectives to add or do you share those experiences that we have just heard?

Michelle Crombie: I share all of those experiences. I think that leadership can sometimes be seen as being at that strategic level, but improvement means leadership at all levels.

I will mention one thing that we have done in Aberdeen. I am not sure whether it is different from what is done in other areas, but I will bring it out. Often, there is a turnover of staff or community members who are working on improvement, so there can be a lot of change in people. In Aberdeen, we have put in place a system that allows anyone who is picking up the baton—or taking on that piece of improvement work—to understand where we are at, what changes we have already tried and what changes have been successful and allows them to carry on from there. That has been important for all of our priorities at a strategic and community level. We have documents that we call project charters, and they set out the issues in the current system, the changes that we think will make an improvement and a plan for testing those changes. Therefore, it does not matter who comes in at that leadership level, whether it is strategic or on the ground, because they have a starting point and they can pick the project up and take it forward. That has been critical to maintaining the momentum in Aberdeen and to achieving the improvements that we have achieved so far.

Jennifer Lees: I will pick up on your community leadership question, Mr Coffey. Our community boards are representing the towns, and we make the point with the community board members that they are not necessarily there to represent Croy tenants association—they are there to represent Kilsyth community board and, as community board members, they are accountable to that wider Kilsyth town and Croy village.

Willie Coffey: I would like to give Evonne a last chance to contribute to that.

Evonne Bauer: I agree with all that has been said. We have had recent success with some projects and programmes, which we have co-produced with members of the community from anchor organisations in which we have been capacity building for some time and which were very active during Covid. Therefore, it is a good-news story that they are now engaged at that level that they will work hand in hand with us.

Willie Coffey: Thank you, everybody.

Convener, for the sake of time, I will hand back to you.

The Convener: That concludes our questions. Clearly, we could spend a lot more time delving deeply into the work that you are doing, and it certainly feels like it is a living, breathing piece of work that you are constantly re-evaluating. You have lots of measures in place and, from talking to all of you, it seems that community planning is working and moving in the right direction. Thank you for spending some time with us this morning.

I will suspend the meeting to allow for a change of witnesses.

10:08

Meeting suspended.

10:14

On resuming—

The Convener: For our second panel, we are joined in the room by Kevin Anderson, who is service lead for policy performance and community planning at South Ayrshire Council; Susan McCardie, who is community planning officer at South Ayrshire Council; Lee Haxton, who is community planning team lead at Perth and Kinross Council; and Fiona Robertson, who is head of culture and communities service at Perth and Kinross Council. We are joined online by Anna Whelan, who is service manager for strategy and partnership at Orkney Islands Council.

I welcome our witnesses to the meeting. As I mentioned to the first panel, we will try to direct our questions to a specific witness where possible, but if you would like to come in, please indicate that to me or the clerks. Anna, as you are appearing virtually, please do that by putting an R in the chat function. There is no need for the witnesses to manually turn their microphones on and off, as we will do that automatically.

We will start with questions from Annie Wells.

Annie Wells: Good morning, panel. I want to touch on the challenges that communities face. We heard last week that inequality can be a moving target and that lots has changed over the past eight years. What are the biggest challenges facing your communities at the moment, and how do you prioritise which ones the CPP tackles?

I will go to Lee Haxton first.

Lee Haxton (Perth and Kinross Council): Annie Wells has got right to the root of the problem straight away. There are multiple initiatives around just now, whether they are to do with funding or communities telling us what their priorities are, and we can be stretched so thin that it is really difficult to respond as well as we possibly could.

That can sometimes be exacerbated by the way that funding is provided for particular issues as opposed to a broader spread of issues. Funding needs to be sustained over long periods. A lot of the issues are deep rooted and have been around for a long time, so three-year and five-year funding programmes simply do not cut it. If the situation is added to by further issues coming forward, it can make things even worse and more challenging for us.

The main thing that we do through community planning partnerships is to try to find the key inherent challenge, and to focus on what we can do collectively. We all have our own individual responsibilities as public sector bodies; it is about how we work collectively through a community planning partnership. Focusing on what only we can do, as opposed to business as usual, gives us a key insight into how to challenge the multiple issues that we are all trying to deal with at the same time.

There is also a cultural aspect to it, in that the individual partners around the CPP table can hold one another to account in order to make sure that we all contribute as effectively as we can to tackling the deep-seated inequalities that we are all trying to deal with.

Annie Wells's question was also about the specific issues that we face. The geography of Perth and Kinross is varied. We have one large city, some small towns and a very large rural area, and their needs are not the same. That adds another layer of complexity to how we deal with, for example, the issues facing the very rural parts of Perth and Kinross in comparison with those facing the centre of Perth city. It is a challenge, but the community planning structure is set up to try and deal with that as best it can.

Annie Wells: Does Kevin Anderson or Susan McCardie want to come in?

Kevin Anderson (South Ayrshire Council): The immediate pressure—it seems to be overwhelming right now—is the cost of living crisis. It has made things a lot worse in areas that were already suffering multiple and complex disadvantage. It is not a case of trying to do lots of new things; it is about trying to put extra emphasis into the stuff that we are already doing in some of those communities. It is certainly pressing, but because it cuts across so many different services and parts of people's lives, community planning is the place to try and address it.

Annie Wells: That brings me on nicely to my next question. I will maybe get some further information from you here. The 2015 act puts a

duty on CPPs to tackle socioeconomic inequalities. To what extent can CPPs and their partners tackle the cause of socioeconomic disadvantage and not just deal with the consequences? For example, we heard last week about the growth in in-work poverty.

Kevin Anderson: In relation to the impact that we can have, it is shades of grey and a matter of degrees. I understand why you worded the question in that way, because we often deal with just the consequences and it is hard to get ahead of ourselves and into that prevention space.

Again, I point to local government and community planning, which I think is the best space to try to do that prevention work, but it is challenging when you are firefighting all the time. There is sometimes a sense of a cluttered landscape within community planning. How do we find consistency of focus in trying to bring all the partners together when all the different national and local priorities can play against one another? We try to do that through a cross-cutting agenda impact assessment that asks whether we are always thinking about climate change or always thinking about poverty. However, it is quite hard to try to pull everyone together and get them to pull in the same direction.

I cannot definitively say whether we are dealing with more than just the consequences right now, but I certainly think that we are in the right place to start moving into that more preventative side of things.

The Convener: Anna wants to come in next.

Anna Whelan (Orkney Islands Council): It is certainly true that, over the past few years, there has been a lot of firefighting and dealing with immediate issues. Our response to that within our community planning partnership was to come up with a two-year emergency recovery LOIP that was focused on the immediate issues.

However, the LOIP that we are developing at the moment, which will come into effect from 1 April, is much longer term—it is a seven-year plan this time. We are being quite ambitious because we are focusing on 2030, which is the target that we have adopted for net zero. That is enabling us to include both immediate measures to tackle our top priorities and longer-term preventative measures.

The partnership has chosen three priorities for the new LOIP where the partnership itself can make a difference. They are not the big issues that are being addressed mainly by individual partners. We have picked the cost of living as an obvious priority. We have immediate measures to address the current problems but, longer term, we are looking at exploring things such as the minimum income guarantee, which we are very interested in because Orkney could be a pilot area for that.

We are also looking at things such as community wealth building, which crosses over into our second priority—sustainable development. Finally, we are looking at local equality, which I know was discussed a lot in your earlier session. We still have parts of Orkney that are not doing as well as other parts in relation to the usual socioeconomic indicators.

Annie Wells: Thank you.

The Convener: Thanks, Annie. We move on to the theme of community empowerment. The questions are from Mark Griffin, who joins us online.

Mark Griffin: What experience do the witnesses have of helping marginalised and disempowered communities to build capacity and confidence so that they can engage with the community planning process? At a more basic level, is there even a public awareness of what community planning is and what it can do to support communities?

Kevin Anderson: On the first part of the question, we have a duty to make sure that we are listening to our communities in what we are doing. Sometimes, that can be the hardest thing to do in our more marginalised communities, and it is about building capacity within those communities to help people play a part where they want to.

We also need to be realistic about how much time people want to give to these initiatives. We are always dead keen on people coming in and speaking to us but they want to see deliverables—they want to see things changing in their community—and a constant string of consultations can sometimes irk people more than help the situation.

In terms of how people can engage with us, it is key to not make that interaction too formal. People will engage if they are there for another reason. We do a lot of engagement at food banks and at events that are aimed at younger people, so that we do not just get the usual suspects. It is about getting a breadth of input into what we are doing and feedback from people who would not normally engage with us.

Sorry—what was the second part of your question?

Mark Griffin: It was about whether there is even an awareness of community planning and the benefits that it can bring. Do people even know that it exists?

Kevin Anderson: I would hazard a guess and say probably not. It is probably not up on the list of things that people know about. I think that even people within certain parts of the local authority

will not really know what community planning is. It can feel quite corporate when we are trying to organise at a strategic level. Usually, it is the partner services that deliver on the ground, and it is not really badged as community planning. I would not say that communities are particularly well versed in what community planning partnerships do or what their aims are.

Mark Griffin: Thanks. Does anyone else in the room or online want to contribute on that point?

Fiona Robertson (Perth and Kinross Council): I think that the questions and the challenges that Kevin Anderson has raised are correct. However, things are changing, partly because of the 2015 act.

It is important to see the 2015 act in a broader context as part of a system within a much wider framework of legislation on public service reform, which has a thread running through it that relates to community empowerment and community participation. It is important to think about community planning in a broader context and to consider the role of third sector interfaces and of audit, scrutiny and regulatory bodies before we come to consider whether communities genuinely feel that they have skin in the game, so to speak.

Perth and Kinross has seven local area partnerships, which represent the local delivery tier of community planning. Those partnerships are all chaired by community representatives, I think, and they make decisions about grant schemes. We are rolling out local area committees. We have a pilot in Kinross in the south of our local authority area, which is a significant step because of the devolved decision-making powers that that committee has. We will be extending that model to other parts of Perth and Kinross over the next two years.

It is possible that communities and the public do not know what community planning is, as Kevin Anderson said. However, the key question is whether that really matters if the language and terminology make sense to those communities and if they understand that there are opportunities to take part in things, such as making decisions and bidding for money through participatory budgeting and other schemes. In our social media channels and through other routes, we have put quite a lot of emphasis on publicising the opportunities for communities to get more actively involved in what is going on in their locality. At the end of the day, that is what matters.

Anna Whelan: Like every partnership, we have struggled with this. However, we have had quite a lot of success in using our third sector interface, Voluntary Action Orkney, as a trusted intermediary and advocate for marginalised communities.

We created our first locality plan in 2018, after having developed it for two years before that, for the ferry-linked isles. Geographically, those islands are, by far, our most marginalised communities. We visited all those islands with Voluntary Action Orkney and we used two techniques to include different community groups and interests and to keep them engaged with the process. First, we conducted a place standard exercise for each island, which helped us to focus on the priorities that every island wanted to see being addressed in the locality plan. Secondly, alongside that process, we conducted a participatory budgeting exercise for each island and we did another that crossed the islands. VAO was successful in gaining two rounds of funding from the community choices fund for that process, which enabled the islands to put some of their proposed actions into effect.

Most recently, VAO has taken a lead in helping to communicate with disempowered communities on a more generic level about the cost of living crisis. The organisation set up Orkney money matters, which is a unified pathway that joins together the various voluntary sector agencies that are supporting people who are struggling with the cost of living crisis.

Mark Griffin: I have another question about comments that the committee heard from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights. It stated that it has a concern that CPPs may be "race-blind" when it comes to tackling inequalities. How do you ensure that all communities, including communities of interest and identity, people with protected characteristics and those who are marginalised, have their voices heard in community planning, and that community planning partners are aware of the issues that are affecting particular interest groups?

10:30

Fiona Robertson: It is a challenge. One of the tensions within community planning is the emphasis on spatial planning and the requirement to think about geographies of place alongside communities of interest. It is important to understand that community planning is a mechanism within a wider systems approach and to actively use it in that way. I am thinking about the legislation and regulations on community learning and development, for example, under which community planning partners, including the local authority, have to be really active in understanding unmet need. The engagement with communities of interest and equalities groups is particularly important in that context and others.

In Perth and Kinross, we have an equalities forum, and the interface between it and our CPP is key. The Covid experience really brought to the

fore the fact that inequalities and how they affect communities of geography and of interest have been a significant moving target in some parts of Perth and Kinross. I am thinking of detailed emergency response work that we did in one part of Perth and Kinross, in which we dealt with households, individuals and families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. That tested our mettle in terms of the equalities issues and the different communities that we are here to serve.

Without wanting to sound too theoretical about it, that whole-systems thinking is absolutely key, as is the LOIP. The LOIP is, or should be, the foundation stone of data and evidence for understanding communities—their diversity and make-up, and what is shifting and changing. If the LOIP is right, it is based on data and evidence, and is focused not on business as usual but on what, as Lee Haxton said, only the CPP can do.

Those should be the touchstones for how we go about our work.

Susan McCardie (South Ayrshire Council): Our LOIP focuses on communities of interest as our priority areas. We are looking at improving outcomes for older people—particularly in relation to supporting people with dementia—and at social isolation and loneliness. South Ayrshire has one of the highest populations of older people in Scotland and, potentially, Europe. Therefore, as we do forward planning, we have to think about that ageing population. Other communities of interest that we are looking at include care-experienced young people and young carers. The equalities officer sits within our team so we work closely with them.

Within community planning, we have been thinking about how we can make engagement better than it already is. We are looking at setting up a new community engagement group, which would be led by our third sector interface, Voluntary Action South Ayrshire. That would formalise community engagement to ensure that we guide community engagement through various routes, which could be locality specific, thematic, based on community groups or communities of interest, or general consultation. We are continually looking to improve that.

Kevin Anderson: I will add to that something that is useful when trying to engage with more marginalised communities. As a community planning partnership, we have adopted the trauma pledge, understanding that our systems are sometimes built in such a way that they unintentionally push people away from engaging. Applying a trauma-informed lens to what we do and understanding people's different experience is helping us to get a better understanding of what we need to do better. That self-reflection has been

really successful and all our partners have bought into it as well, so that approach has been helpful.

The Convener: Thank you very much for adding that. It is interesting that more and more organisations and councils are considering that trauma-led approach. It seems to be bringing good outcomes.

The next theme is the role of the third sector. Paul McLennan will lead on that.

Paul McLennan: Good morning, panel. Like a couple of other colleagues on the committee, I was previously a councillor—in my case, for 15 years. I also chair the cross-party group on social enterprise, so I have a real interest in the third sector.

The issue comes down to where community planning sits in local councils and localities, where the third sector comes in, and how third sector organisations feel involved. The feedback that we had from events that we held is that the picture is very mixed across Scotland. It is about consistency and models of good practice. Where do you see the third sector playing that role, not just in being part of decision making but in delivering services as well?

Susan McCardie: Voluntary Action South Ayrshire—VASA—is our TSI. It is a very active member of our community planning board and is active in our community planning structures. The pandemic highlighted the crucial role of the third sector in community planning and supporting our communities, particularly around the initial response.

VASA has been instrumental in doing some key pieces of work. It has developed a volunteering strategy for South Ayrshire, which it will be leading on, and it has been leading on some of the response to the cost of living crisis. As we mentioned in our written evidence, VASA has developed a booklet for all homes in South Ayrshire, which has been brilliant. There has been really good feedback from the community about having something posted through the door. VASA has also led on the development of the cosy hubs. It is crucial for us with regard to engagement, particularly with wider community organisations and the people that they support in the community. They are delivering some key projects in our local outcome improvement plans.

The third sector is certainly very much part of our work in South Ayrshire. There are other areas, such as the community food network. There are lots of forums that align to some of our community planning structures around older people and children and young people, and now we are looking at climate change and sustainability. The sector is very well engaged.

Lee Haxton: Our experience is similar to that of South Ayrshire with VASA. Our third sector interface, the Perth & Kinross Association of Voluntary Service, has the interesting acronym PKAVS. For the past 18 months to two years, the community planning board has been co-chaired by our third sector interface, which reflects the value that we place on its input and the fact that it can bring a different perspective to all the issues that are discussed round the table.

In my response to the first question, I mentioned the challenges that the geography of Perth and Kinross can cause. That is similar for the TSI, in that it covers a significant area with very different issues and has to decide how it can use its resource to best effect to ensure that it is representing that third sector voice, as it were.

A proactive third sector interface can play an important role at the strategic level round the board table, but also at a local level, in supporting communities to build their capacity, skills and confidence to get involved, not just in community planning as a process, but in general community empowerment activity, which all adds to the greater whole. PKAVS is a fundamental partner in Perth and Kinross.

Paul McLennan: That is important, and those are good examples. You said that there is a link with the local authority but also with local communities. There is an element where that is kind of missing.

Anna, from Orkney's point of view, is that more difficult? I suppose that the TSI is on a slightly different scale, but does that make it more difficult or easier in your experience?

Anna Whelan: Our TSI has been an absolutely core member of our partnership right from the beginning. It is hugely influential and important in what we do. I know that many CPPs—well, all of them, as far as I know—are in the same position, and yet TSIs still feel somehow like second-class citizens, because they are not specified in the 2015 act as a partner. Obviously, that is because the act cannot place a public duty on a body that is not a public body.

In our written response to the inquiry, we suggested that perhaps the act, as well as the schedule of statutory partners, could have a list of partners that have a right to be invited to participate on boards. It would be up to them, but they would have a statutory right to be there. Certainly, our TSI has been hugely valuable.

Paul McLennan: I ask Kevin Anderson whether his local authority would support that point about TSIs becoming statutory partners. I certainly think that it would make sense, but what is your view?

Kevin Anderson: Even just from what we have described so far, it is clear that TSIs are integral to what we are doing. To be honest, we probably already treat them like a statutory partner, without it being set out in law, because they are so integral to what we are doing.

Paul McLennan: I know from experience of the TSI in my area that what it does is invaluable.

Lee and Fiona, do you think the same?

Fiona Robertson: I am not really sure, to be honest. I think that legislation in this context, as in other contexts, should be a tool of last resort.

Paul McLennan: What about strengthening the relationship formally?

Fiona Robertson: Fundamentally, like colleagues in South Ayrshire, I think or hope that our third sector colleagues see themselves very much as equal partners round the table, not least because they co-chair the CPP.

The focus on the list of those who are duty bound to participate in community planning probably needs to be on the role of national bodies, which you might be moving on to. I cannot see that the recommendation would do any harm; equally, it is fundamentally down to the quality of the relationship at local level and parity of esteem.

Paul McLennan: Yes. It came out earlier that the views are very mixed. Some TSIs feel that they have good involvement with the council, but some third sector organisations do not feel that they have a good relationship with the TSIs. That might be something for the committee to take away and discuss.

The Convener: I will move on to LOIPs and locality plans. Fiona, I was interested to hear you say that LOIPs are the foundation stone and that the plans should be focused on what CPPs can do.

What processes do your community planning partnerships follow when developing your LOIPs and locality plans? We heard from the previous panel that there is quite a lot of refreshing of plans and new plans, so I am interested in whether you have ideas about doing things differently.

Fiona Robertson: The big shift for us was, again, partly catalysed by Covid, but we were moving in this direction anyway. As I think everyone is aware, writing a 10-year strategy of any kind can be a risky business, because we need to try to look forward in a meaningful way to how the world needs to be in 10 years, and that can feel quite distant and theoretical, particularly when you are trying to generate grass-roots input into the LOIP.

In developing a LOIP, the CPP needs to reach a balance between being strategic—taking an area-

wide view and being clear about the priorities within the priorities—and making it real and sufficiently focused on the issues and challenges in the here and now.

During Covid, we took the decision as a CPP, as we have done with a number of key strategies, to write a one-year delivery plan, which is constantly reviewed and rolled forward. That is because there were significant issues—even thinking back to two years ago—where we just did not know how things would unfold.

A short-life working group led by one of the CPP partners—Skills Development Scotland, in this instance—developed our new set of priorities for the LOIP. Again, as you would expect and in common with other colleagues, those priorities are very much focused on tackling poverty, mental and physical health and wellbeing, digital participation and engagement and inclusion—which emerged as quite a big issue for us—and skills and employability as part of Covid recovery. However, there is always what I would describe as a dilemma to be managed rather than an intractable problem in relation to how you join up the area-level strategic part of the LOIP, which cannot be too distant, managerial and theoretical, and what is actually happening from the bottom up, at the grass roots.

The Convener: I have another question, although I think that you have already answered it. It is about the level of involvement in the development of LOIPs from communities. I think that you said that TSIs are chairing your seven local area partnerships, but are they involved in the agenda setting as well?

Fiona Robertson: Yes.

The Convener: Great. Does somebody from South Ayrshire want to come in on that question?

Kevin Anderson: Neither Susan McCardie nor I was in post for the development of our current LOIP, so we do not have too much detail on that, but we are getting to the stage of looking at our next iteration.

We are exploring the idea of some local LOIPs. I know that the L stands for "local" already but, instead of having one LOIP for the entire geography, we will split it into six area-based LOIPs with smaller outcomes. Those local LOIPs will be derived from what the communities feel that they need and want and how they can feed that back in, as well as what the data tells us.

Sometimes, there is a difficulty when you try to make a strategic plan and have the community's needs, which are very apparent, right in front of you, because, when you get into the data—whether it be on health or antisocial behaviour—you can see longer-term trends that you need to

start addressing. There is a need to get the balance right between finding the big strategic goals that we need to try to meet for our localities and what is important to communities. That will always be a tough balancing act.

10:45

The Convener: To what level do you imagine communities will be involved in that agenda setting as you go forward with that work?

Kevin Anderson: It is theoretical at the moment, but I expect that they would be involved in the setting of the LOIP priorities. We would have to say what we think, ask what they think and try to get the balance in between. We need to ensure that the LOIP is strategic enough but has resonance with the local community.

The Convener: Anna, I think that you touched a bit on LOIPs but, if you want to share anything more about the Orkney Islands Council work, please do.

Anna Whelan: The process for our current LOIP started more than a year ago with a major public consultation engagement exercise called "Orkney Matters". It was a collaborative exercise across a number of service areas and partners because we do not want to consult our communities over and again for different plans. The exercise visited a number of geographical areas, islands, communities of interest, young people's groups and those who are seldom heard, and the outcome—which is a huge information resource—has been used to develop our LOIP, our new council plan and a number of other partner plans that have been in development lately.

Having gathered that huge amount of information, the community planning board met and carried out a horizon-scanning exercise, which it periodically does. It looks at that information, all the legislation that is coming in, what different partner strategies want and matters such as our net zero target—it was the subject of a great deal of discussion about whether we should go for 2030 as that target, and we did.

The board also thinks about what the partnership can add value to in terms of selecting—[*Inaudible*.] It cannot do that in every area. It has to be things that can be delivered only through a partnership approach. That is how we came up with our three strategic priorities, which were mentioned earlier: the cost of living, sustainable development and local equality.

Having drafted our LOIP, we put it out to a further consultation, although we know that you do not often get much back in the way of response to such consultations. We got about 89 responses,

which is not bad for a small island area. The next stage is for our delivery groups to take those strategic priorities away and work them up. Two of them are well under way already and the third one will get going soon.

That is the process that we go through.

The Convener: What level are the delivery groups at? Are they place based or theme based?

Anna Whelan: They are theme based. Our board assigns them a strategic priority and they take it away and work it up. The LOIP contains the basic things that the board wants to be delivered. For example, for local equality, we have measures such as a locality plan, which supports local community-led development plans. We do not want to duplicate those; we want to find ways in which we can reinforce them and help deliver them.

The delivery groups have been assigned consideration of themes such as digital connectivity that will meet the needs of every user in every community, because we still have areas that the reaching 100 per cent—R100— programme has not reached. We know that, when a programme says that it will reach 95 per cent, we are the 5 per cent. We also have themes such as transport connectivity, which meets the needs of users within what is achievable in the timeframe, because we are fairly sure that, even in seven years' time, we will not have our completely new ferry fleet, although that is looking a lot more hopeful since the ferry task force started to address it recently.

We want to see an improvement in the population, demographic balance, resilience and wellbeing of our most fragile communities. That is core to the national islands plan as well. On measuring that in the long term, we want to see a long-term improvement in the ratings of our most disadvantaged communities in the SIMD.

The Convener: Thank you for that detail. You have started to touch on another question that I have for you, which I will direct to folks in the room. Last week, we heard from the Accounts Commission that a number of partners have not published locality plans, despite being required to do so by the 2015 act. I would be interested to hear how locality plans have worked in your areas. How have your CPPs targeted interventions to those areas needing most assistance?

Susan McCardie: In South Ayrshire, locality planning is known as place plans. There may be some slight confusion around the language. We are not directly involved in the place-planning process, but a tremendous amount of engagement has taken place in our local communities using the place standard toolkit. That has been happening since 2021 and 2022, and engagement outcome reports were published during the summer of 2022, setting out priorities and comments on the early engagements.

Time will now be taken to write up action plans or place plans for those areas. The plan is for somebody to be brought in to support that process. It is hoped that action plans will be developed and published for our local communities by mid-2023—and I repeat the point that they are known as place plans in South Ayrshire. We will be doing some work on the language. I am conscious that there could be confusion, as there are also local place plans as part of national planning framework 4.

As regards locality planning, some work is taking place in Wallacetown, which Kevin Anderson is probably better placed than me to describe, but it involves the development of a team around the community model. The community empowerment legislation and the guidance that we have very much meet the locality planning requirement. Extensive work is taking place to bring the team into the community and develop an action plan to support that community. Wallacetown is one of our most deprived communities in South Ayrshire, and a huge strategic piece of work has been taking place.

Kevin Anderson can talk more about that, if that is okay.

Kevin Anderson: The Wallacetown work is largely data driven, taking into account where the poverty and inequalities come from in South Ayrshire. They are quite concentrated in Wallacetown and the wider Ayr North area. The fact that the work there has been data driven has been really useful to explain why we may need additional resource and a different approach in that locality.

That is the real strength of locality plans and locality planning: understanding that, although South Ayrshire is not a huge local authority, needs vary quite wildly between different parts of its rural and more urban areas. The ability to use the data and work out what is different is a real strength of locality planning.

The stage that I would love to get to, instead of our resources being dragged into areas of high demand and high need, is to plan at the start, knowing where we need to focus our attention and budgeting for that in the first instance. Locality planning gives us the platform to do that. There is real potential to grow that work out, which is why we are using the LOIPs—six locality plans that are much more focused on what their specific areas need.

The Convener: Thank you for that detail.

What about Perth and Kinross, Fiona?

Fiona Robertson: I would say a couple of things on this point. The Accounts Commission report and findings are interesting. It is important to be curious about the reasons why not all local authorities and CPPs will necessarily have published such plans.

I made a point earlier about understanding community planning in a broader context, the role of the scrutiny bodies and how scrutiny practice has evolved and changed along the lines of the wider community empowerment agenda.

There are a couple of more specific things to mention. We have a number of community action plans in place, which have emerged across different localities in Perth and Kinross over the past couple of years, funded for the most part by LEADER funding—rural economic development funding—and through other routes in other cases.

It is really important—this is a genuine challenge—to make sure that that local action planning process happens consistently and, to go back to one of your earlier questions, that it engages with less vocal communities of place or interest. Well-mobilised communities with strong local infrastructure tend to be the ones that come forward first with that kind of local action plan, which is used to inform the LOIP from the bottom up.

The CPP board has identified a couple of areas in Perth and Kinross as priorities for deep locality working and action planning. There is one in eastern Perthshire, which I mentioned in an earlier answer, where significant issues have come to the fore in the past two to three years. That local action planning process has been important, and we are about to bring that work to fruition.

I do not want to dominate the evidence session, but I will make one final point. Colleagues from South Ayrshire have referred to a tension between the emphasis in NPF4 on spatial planning and the requirement for place plans, which include the place principle of understanding what a place is about in its skin. What is its aspiration? What does its community want it to be and become? Sometimes, it is inevitable that spatial planning drives the agenda in a way that is not necessarily easy for the CPP to reconcile. There are a few things on the back of the Accounts Commission findings for us all to reflect on and be curious about.

The Convener: You raise an interesting point about the tension between spatial planning, local place plans, locality plans and delivery of service. It is all connected, so it becomes quite complex to pull in all those threads.

I move on to the next theme, on measuring impact, and bring in Marie McNair.

Marie McNair: Good morning, and thank you for giving us your time. At last week's committee meeting, the Accounts Commission stated that it is still difficult for CPPs to demonstrate what impact they are having. Does data at a local level allow CPPs to demonstrate the impact that their decisions and actions have on inequality levels and other outcomes?

I will pop that question first to Kevin Anderson.

Kevin Anderson: The data is absolutely critical. We in South Ayrshire have been on a data journey recently. One of the best things that we have done is start working with our list analysts in the national health service to get some good, rich data on our localities, which they can break down. That has been really helpful. It is fair to say that that has changed our approach to what we do.

Our challenge is to deal with issues on the ground on which we want to make a difference and that are dead easy to measure, while working towards the longer-term improvements in healthy life expectancy in more marginalised communities that we want to happen. Regardless of whether we focus on the local priority or the strategic priority, the data is key.

We are much better at demonstrating the immediate impacts. Demonstrating where we are over the longer term on bigger challenges such as poverty and inequality is much harder to measure, and there is much more external influence, which makes it difficult.

We often wrestle with the ideas of contribution and attribution in what we do as a community planning partnership. It is difficult to attribute changes in child poverty to a community planning partnership, but from a contribution analysis point of view, we know that we make a difference. However, that is difficult to capture at times.

Lee Haxton: Similar to what Kevin said, I note that a lot of the data that is provided is crucial, but a lot of it is quantitative and can miss the qualitative element. We need to get that balance right so that the community voice is heard, because it is often not captured in bare statistics.

We have a small data team in Perth and Kinross Council, and there are other such teams in other community planning partners, but there certainly is a longer-term issue about how that information is collected and shared. Perhaps joint resourcing between partners would make that straightforward and give us a foundation of evidence that we could all use.

I liked Kevin's turn of phrase, "contribution and attribution". The word that I had in my head was "causality". We could quite conceivably make a significant impact, but could we actually attribute the cause of that to something that we had done

as a community planning partnership? The data would probably not show us that but, in our gut, we would probably know that something that we had done had made that difference. Maybe some kind of broader impact studies on the work that CPPs have done and how they have evidenced the impact that they have made over a longer period would help to inform how we and other community planning partners can do that in the future.

11:00

However, at the same time, we can do only so much analysis. Fiona Robertson is very good at using the phrase "avoid paralysis by analysis". We sometimes spend so long considering the data that we forget to get down to the action. Therefore, we need to be clear that the data that we are using and collecting is the best data that we have and that it tells us where we need to focus our time and resources, so that, collectively, we can take the action that is necessary to make the impact. Over time, we would hope to see the dial being shifted. I mentioned earlier that a lot of the issues that we are dealing with are very long seated. It will be almost impossible to show a change in those issues over a short period, whether that is one to three years or even five to 10 years. Therefore, we need to be patient with that.

Marie McNair: Absolutely—thank you.

Anna Whelan, do you want to comment further on that?

Anna Whelan: On islands, of course, we are dealing with microdata, which has problems of its own. First, it is often not reported nationally in any form that we can use. Secondly, even if it is reported, it often has to be redacted, because the numbers in any one minority are too small. Therefore, we regularly have to explain that we cannot report on, for example, protected characteristics in subjects such as child poverty, because the numbers are so small that it would be intrusive to do so, even if we could report them at all.

Therefore, we are always looking for sources of data that are useful to us, and a very good source that has recently become available is the national islands plan survey, which is being done specifically to track progress on the national islands plan. That survey was done for the first time in 2020; it will be done again this year and, after that, it will be done—I hope—every two years.

What makes that source so useful is that the data is being reported—as we on Orkney Islands Council requested—in such a way that we can split out our ferry-linked isles from our islands that are joined to our mainland. The big divide that we have is between the ferry-linked isles and the ones that are joined by causeways to the Orkney mainland.

As Lee Haxton said, qualitative reporting is very important for us, because that is one way in which we can assess whether we are being effective, and it is a lot more useful for benchmarking purposes.

Marie McNair: I have a second question. Some submissions to the inquiry spoke about equalities in terms of equal access to high-quality public services. What impact has the 2015 act had on the quality of public services? Are you confident that people in your area have equal access to public services, regardless of where they live or their community of interest?

I know that that has already been touched on in some of the responses, but would anyone like to add anything further? While I have got you, Anna, would you like to come in?

Anna Whelan: Yes, I will do, since my mic is still on.

I would say that we do not, by any means, have equal access, which is why local equality has been selected by the partnership as one of its top priorities this time around. A recent example was the issue of first responders on each of our islands, which was brought to the attention of our community planning board. At the moment, there is a collection of very ad hoc arrangements, so we are looking for a partnership solution to ensure that there is equal access to those services, whenever they are needed.

Fiona Robertson: I think that it is very difficult. There are a couple of questions: first, do we mean equal access or equitable access? The role of the CPP board in strategic resource management is about making sure that the resources that are at its disposal—money, people, skills, property and other physical assets—are well aligned with the priorities and that the priorities, in turn, are well informed by good data on socioeconomic disadvantage.

Perth and Kinross is not unique by any means, and Anna Whelan has brought that to life beautifully in her evidence to the committee. We have a very big and diverse geography, where a small population is widely dispersed over a big rural area. Only a third of our population lives in Perth, and the rest lives outside Perth in one of our towns, or in our hamlets and villages, of which there are about 154. Therefore, it is a huge challenge to make decisions about equitable distribution of resources that are well tailored to particular locality needs. There are some very tough decisions for the CPP, both at an individual partner level and collectively, about how those resources are best used.

The role of communities—we spoke about community empowerment earlier—is key in that. Increasingly, our dialogue with communities is about where the CPP will focus its time and resource, and maybe pull back, as public finances continue to tighten, in areas where the community is well mobilised and best placed—sometimes, it is better based—to take the lead in addressing a particular issue.

Marie McNair: Thank you for that contribution.

I have nothing further to add, convener.

The Convener: We move on to the theme of the culture of public bodies, with questions from Miles Briggs.

Miles Briggs: Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. My questions relate to the issue that Fiona Robertson has just touched on—the diversion of resources for shared priorities. Do you have examples of where a change in culture and partnership working has facilitated that?

I was interested to hear Anna Whelan talk about individual island plans. How do those shape the way in which resources are allocated?

Anna Whelan: That has not happened yet. I mentioned individual community-led plans as one of the things that will feed into our local equality plan. However, I have some interesting examples of sharing resources. One is that our partnership support team is jointly funded by the five facilitating partners, and has been for about six or seven years, which might be unique in Scotland.

Another example is that, recently, we have twice run a funding exercise in which the board has asked Voluntary Action Orkney to take the lead—[*Inaudible*.]. That first happened during the pandemic, when VAO brought to the attention of the board the fact that some of the third sector bodies on which people depend were really struggling. The council allocated £300,000 to be distributed by VAO, and we drew up some criteria around a bidding round. The decision making—not just the management—was done by its finance and audit committee, with support from me as the council representative.

We reran that exercise for a different reason very recently. We are in the middle of a second round, which is being managed in the same way. That is in response to the cost of living crisis, which has hit our third sector organisations very hard again. We are using the islands cost crisis emergency fund for that, which the islands team managed to pull together—we are hugely grateful for that. Again, that funding has been allocated to VAO to distribute by similar mechanisms to those that were used before, to ensure that our third sector agencies, which are right on the front line in

supporting people through the crisis, are themselves adequately supported.

Miles Briggs: Thank you. Does anyone else have anything to add on that?

I am interested in an issue that everyone has touched on—the urban-rural dynamics of your councils and the competing needs that that gives rise to. I think that Lee Haxton said that the needs are just not the same. How does that facilitate the use of a different model? Sometimes, you will have fewer people who might be able to take forward different projects. Interestingly, some communities might not have a council-owned facility. How do you put together support in those circumstances? How do you facilitate the community to take the lead?

Do you want to come in on that, Fiona?

Fiona Robertson: That is a huge question, to which there are many different answers, but I will say a few things to stimulate thinking.

Very unfortunately, poverty and the cost of living crisis have really catalysed some of the discussions about where the CPP needs to focus our attention, which is on what we can do that only we can do, and where we might need to disinvest or pull back. An example of that is our conversations with communities about local asset transfer, which can be a very powerful tool and a way of shifting power away from public bodies, putting it into the hands of communities and protecting assets—particularly in small rural communities where, otherwise, the assets might just deteriorate.

The cost of living crisis and the increasing prevalence of poverty—in Perth and Kinross, the data and the evidence that we have on that have shifted quite significantly—have stimulated a lot of very different and much more hard-edged conversations. In the past six months, the council has established a multi-agency poverty task force, and although it is a council initiative, its interface with the CPP is key. That is stimulating some very different thinking about how resources are best used.

However, it is a huge topic, Mr Briggs, so I might not be able to cover it adequately.

Miles Briggs: Does anyone else have anything to add?

Kevin Anderson: The budget is a real challenge. My experience of community planning is that partners are very willing to share resources such as staff time, and to rearrange their staff, but actually putting money together in a pot is much more difficult. We have tried to do that a few times and, at times, it can be quite frustrating that we cannot put a small pot together, given the money that is available around the table. Likewise, under

the current budget round, that pot is one of the things that would have had to go if we had had it in the first place, because times are really tight.

If we are moving toward a more locality-based model of service delivery, budgets need to align with that. In localities that have been really successful at that, there is a budget attached. It does not have to be a huge budget, but a budget helps when a decision is taken to make decisions locally, to act on that and to be responsive to the needs of communities. The more closely we can align our budgets with our localities, the more flexibility we will have in delivering services that are specific to those needs.

Miles Briggs: Have you seen improvements when there is co-location of services, especially in rural communities? I grew up in Bankfoot in Perthshire. Looking back, what was there during my childhood has all gone, from the police station to the nursing provision. Now, services are co-located in the new church centre. There is lots going on there, but it has all had to come together, and I do not know whether that has been of benefit to some services and of detriment to others. Is there any data on how people change how they access such services?

Fiona Robertson: I do not know that there is much data so far, but co-location and having one public estate is increasingly being thought about. I know the centre in Bankfoot that you mentioned. There is another example in eastern Perthshire, where a health centre that was repurposed through a community-led initiative using town centre regeneration money has opened in the past few months. That initiative is community led, but we are exploring the opportunity to co-locate public services under that roof.

I am not sure that there is much evidence around shifts in behaviour or shifts in demand and need yet, although your question is a good one. Lots of local authorities—as distinguished from the CPP role—have the community campus model. We have that in Perth and Kinross, and it has resulted in some quite significant shifts in behaviour and expectation in public services and communities about how a hub model can work. It does not work everywhere, for a variety of reasons, but the role of physical assets in communities—whether we are talking about a small community hall or a much bigger facility in a larger urban area—is really important, and it is sometimes overlooked.

Lee Haxton: I have a small additional comment to make. Your question touched on resourcing at a local level, and one thing that has been successful in Perth and Kinross has been that, in the main, council funding has been apportioned to the local action partnerships that Fiona Robertson mentioned earlier, mostly to allow them to invest in projects that help to deliver their locality action plan. We have seen some positive results.

11:15

I can give two examples. In eastern Perthshire, there was a view that there was an issue around the provision of youth work and youth facilities, and they used a significant amount of their budget to support additional work in the area. In the south, in the Kinross-shire area, the issue of wi-fi access was highlighted, and the local action partnership decided to use a significant amount of its money to pay for wi-fi installation in village halls so that there was improved coverage.

Therefore, that has shifted the dial. Again, as Fiona Robertson alluded to, the data is probably not there, but we know that that has made a positive difference.

The Convener: We move to our final theme. Willie Coffey has questions on national and local leadership.

Willie Coffey: Good morning, everyone. You might have heard the part of our discussion with the previous panel when we talked about leadership at national and local levels. With those witnesses, I tried to focus on how local leadership works. I will turn the question around a bit and ask you what your local community thinks about the leadership that you show in the community planning partnerships. Do you ever ask them?

Fiona Robertson: I did not hear the first part of your question.

Willie Coffey: I am interested in examples of local leadership, how that drives the CPP process and what the community thinks of it. Do you ever ask your local community what it thinks of the leadership that you show in driving the CPPs? If you ask them, what do they say?

Fiona Robertson: I cannot say that we have ever asked that question explicitly during my time in the council, but there is a strong culture in the CPP, statutory partners and certainly in the local authority of being visible and present in communities. We have had the local action partnerships in place for some years and we have been developing a lead officer model. The lead officer—who might be a council officer or someone from another CPP partner—is meant to be the go-to person for the community in that locality. They can pick up and troubleshoot any issues and understand new issues, problems or challenges as they emerge on the ground.

Alongside that, through the process of developing the LOIPs, we have the community action plans that I mentioned earlier. In fairness, the dialogue between public authorities and communities about the quality of local public

services that are designed and delivered in their area is a two-way street. Your question is a good one. It is also important that that dialogue with communities is honest, open and, perhaps most importantly, sustained over time, so it is—to reach for a cliché—a process, not just an event. That is what has credibility and integrity for communities: the fact that, although, inevitably, over the long term, the individuals involved might change, the public authorities and public services that are rooted in those communities are in it for the long term and have a stake in the success of that area.

Willie Coffey: Thank you. I will pop up to Orkney and ask Anna Whelan what the local community thinks of the engagement and leadership shown to drive the CPP process there.

Anna Whelan: That is an interesting question—it is the other way round from what we were expecting. I think that the community is probably less interested in who is sitting in the chair than it is in what the CPP is actually achieving. We have strong leadership from many of the partners in the CPP. It is difficult to answer the exact question that you are posing, because that is not the one that we were led to believe that we were going to get.

Willie Coffey: Oh dear.

Anna Whelan: I am sorry about that. I will come back in later when we move on to the other question that we were expecting.

Willie Coffey: I will turn to my colleagues in South Ayrshire. How do you engage with local people on what their views are of the whole leadership process?

Kevin Anderson: Like other authorities, we did not ask that specific question. Our communities do not have a particularly strong knowledge of what community planning is.

It is a difficult thing to measure, but, for me, trust is the absolutely key measure of how well we are doing in engaging with our communities. If our communities are approaching us and are seeing the benefits of co-location and trauma-informed practice, that trust will build. That trust has gone from some of our more marginalised communities, where promises were made but not kept. If we work collectively to build trust, not only in the council but in all the partners that are involved, that will be where we can start to make a difference to communities. Once that trust is there, it will be harder to break.

Prevention is also important. We do not want to have people in crisis. We want to have systems that allow people to come and speak to us. Trust is a key part of that too.

That is how I am trying to measure how well we are doing. It is difficult. When we do co-location,

people who might not have done so in the past will come to speak and engage with us. That is not an exact measure, but it gives us a sense that we are moving in the right direction.

Willie Coffey: My Ayrshire colleagues are here, but my next question could be asked about any community that has areas of multiple deprivation. Susan McCardie, you mentioned Wallacetown, part of which is affectionately known locally as White City, as I am sure you know. A few years ago, that community wanted to have its own houses demolished so that it could start again. How does a community planning process engage with an issue such as that to try to turn it round? The same thing could be happening in other communities in Scotland. How have you engaged with communities through the CPP process in order to influence the outcome and turn things around?

Susan McCardie: I will have to think, because it was a couple of years ago. Work was done at the time by our community planning executive and community planning board. We had a workshop session about Wallacetown and asked partners how we could support communities and what we could do to improve outcomes in that area.

We established a Wallacetown strategic delivery partnership, which reports to our community planning board. The main aim of that group was to develop a team around the community model, bringing services into Wallacetown and using the co-location that Kevin Anderson mentioned. The fire service, Police Scotland and the NHS health and social care partnership have committed to co-location and to bringing staff into the area. Teams go out on joint patrols or make joint visits and members of the community are engaging with officers in the area. The police are focusing on wellbeing and on the link between poverty and health inequalities, which lead to poorer outcomes.

A lot of work has taken place and it is very much a multi-agency project in which all partners are equal. As Kevin said, food banks are now engaging with members of the community that they would not necessarily have engaged with before. Early on, there was something called a street week, in which every single door in that community was chapped on. I was involved in that process. We used a questionnaire and spoke to members of the community, asking them how they felt about living in the area. There were very mixed results and that feedback has gone out to the community. We are going to go back round the doors again in the next couple of months to speak to the community and find out what difference has been made.

Several subgroups have been set up as part of the Wallacetown project. There is a community voice group to encourage members of the

community to participate in conversations with services and to look at re-establishing local groups. Lots of work is taking place with our thriving communities service to support parents, families, children and young people. There is work on the cleanliness of the area. Environmental hit squads are going in to clean up the local area, and that is getting tremendous feedback.

The shaping places for wellbeing programme is looking at Ayr and linking that with Wallacetown to look at the impact that improving a place can have on health inequality. Other groups are looking at co-location of services. It is a big piece of work and Kevin Anderson is probably better placed than I am to speak about it.

Willie Coffey: You have done well.

Susan McCardie: Thank you.

Willie Coffey: Is that set of actions driven through the CPP process? Can you say, with your hand on your heart, that people in that community do not now think the way that they thought a few years ago, or is there still a journey to go on?

Kevin Anderson: There is still a journey to go on. The issues in Wallacetown did not happen overnight, so I have always said to partners that it will be 10 years before we can really say whether we have been successful or not. There are lots of interim steps that we need to keep an eye on.

You asked whether that work came through the community planning process. It absolutely did. When we had that street week, we went to speak to about 1,000 households and found about 450 in, which is a pretty good sample size. We asked them about their experience of living in Wallacetown. There was nothing in the results that the council could have addressed on its own, so the approach has to be led by community planning.

We have data from the people living there about their experiences, and we also have a lot of really detailed health data, which shows that their outcomes are the worst in South Ayrshire. We must ensure that we are not only looking at how to make things better on the ground but being strategic and focusing on public health initiatives in the area to start tackling the long-term poor health outcomes. It is a balancing act, and community planning is the way to do that.

Willie Coffey: It is absolutely brilliant to hear that. Thank you so much for that real and specific example of how this stuff works, not in theory but actually in practice and on the ground. I welcome those responses.

The Convener: That concludes our discussion of those themes. It has been great to hear people's perspectives and to delve more deeply into the work of community planning partnerships.

I suspend the meeting to allow for a change of witnesses.

11:26

Meeting suspended.

11:31

On resuming—

The Convener: We are joined by our third panel. Dr Oliver Escobar is a senior lecturer in public policy at the University of Edinburgh, and Mark McAteer is representing the Community Planning Improvement Board today, although he is also director of strategic planning, performance and communications in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. I welcome the witnesses to the meeting. As I mentioned to previous panels, we will try to direct our questions to specific witnesses when possible but, if you wish to contribute, please indicate that to the clerks. There is no need to turn your microphones on or off; we will do that automatically.

We start with questions from Annie Wells.

Annie Wells: Good morning, and thanks very much for coming. How can CPPs ensure that all communities, including deprived and marginalised communities of interest, have a say in the design, delivery and evaluation of local services?

I put that question to Mark McAteer first.

Mark McAteer (Community Planning Improvement Board): You are giving me the easy ones, then.

Annie Wells: Yes.

Mark McAteer: There are a number of areas where CPPs and partners are generally working. You will know this from previous evidence sessions—I heard the tail end of your discussions with representatives from Perth and Kinross Council, Orkney Islands Council and South Ayrshire Council. As partners, CPPs do a lot of local work, such as formal surveys in localities across the council area or the CPP area as a whole, and they will routinely ask a variety of questions that will help to shape the priorities for the area.

More important is the outreach work that takes place in communities themselves. That is where we all have officers embedded within communities as part of their day-to-day work, as well as when they are working under the CPP guys.

I heard a brief discussion about Wallacetown in South Ayrshire earlier in the meeting. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has a permanent member of staff based in Wallacetown, who walks the beat with their partners, constantly engaging

with the community on things that are directly related to the CPP, and often just helping out where they can. That builds a relationship and brings intelligence back into the CPP and, for us, up to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service at national level.

There are a range of approaches across the country, but it is engagement at the local level and discussion with the community that provides the best insight and intelligence on what really matters to a community and on what we should think about in addressing the issues and challenges there.

Annie Wells: Would you like to add anything, Dr Escobar?

Dr Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh): Yes—and thanks for having me.

The short answer lies in going back to the original purpose of community planning, which was always to find a working combination of partnership at the strategic level and community grass-roots engagement. Some places have done that better than others.

We have been working on community planning for 40 years—we may think that it is more recent, but the pilots were in the 1990s, so we are close to the 40-year anniversary.

What does it mean on the ground? Some community planning partnerships already do the work quite well, but a lot of them rely on intermediaries. That means that some communities of interest, place or practice do not see themselves represented, because they might not feel that existing associations and groups represent them. We need more opportunities for direct engagement. Some examples involve participatory budgeting, which some community planning partnerships are supporting. Some involve work on developing better digital infrastructure, which is now accelerating as a consequence of the pandemic.

There is a lot still to be done to include and work better with community anchor organisations. At present, many CPPs have only community councils and third sector interfaces represented on them. Given how important community anchor organisations such as community development trusts, housing associations and community ownership initiatives have become, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic and in dealing with the cost of living crisis right now, they need a stronger seat at the table. That would increase the capacity of CPPs to act, because community anchor organisations can reach deep into communities.

There is a lot to be done, but we need to retain the original purpose of community planning.

Annie Wells: That is really interesting. Forty years—who would have thought it?

I move to my second question. We have heard that there are few community participation specialists left in local authorities, which leaves a gap in expertise. Do community participation professionals have the resources that they need to build capacity and support in community participation? We have heard that there is a lack of those specialists in order to achieve what you are talking about.

Mark McAteer: For all public service partners across all sectors, including the third sector, recruitment and retention of staff is a massive challenge. That applies in particular in respect of people who have specialist skill sets for community engagement purposes, which is a very skilled area of work. We all have that challenge, across the board; it is a challenge for CPPs and local authorities. Some have better provision than others, but across the sector we do well at sharing insight, intelligence, learning and understanding about what we can do to engage better with communities.

The community planning networks manager brings together the 32 network managers and people from across the sector, and a lot of exchange and learning goes on with regard to how one CPP, which does not have that skill, can learn from the insight of another CPP that has that skill, or has more of it. A lot of work goes on in that way.

However, we also have staff on the ground in many of those communities, and we use the insights that we gain from them. That is not a substitute for the specialist skills that are needed for more strategically organised conversations and engagement with communities, but it gives us another avenue into those communities.

Oliver Escobar talked about something else that comes into play here. We tend to talk about community in geographical terms—community as a place—and the evidence that we have built up over the years tells us why a focus on place is critically important. However, we should not forget that there are also communities of interest and of identity, and they can be much more challenging to engage with because they are not as geographically concentrated.

It is harder to chap doors, for example, as we heard earlier in relation to the South Ayrshire example. When a community is dispersed across the country, finding the means to engage with those people to get their voices heard is a challenge. That is where getting some of the technical skill sets becomes more of an issue for us, because those groups are harder to reach. That is why we end up with intermediaries,

although even finding intermediary channels to have conversations can prove difficult at times.

It is a challenge, but we try to work across the sector to support one another and share the learning, insight and capacity that we have. Could we do with more? Yes, but that is probably a common refrain across every single public service in every single conversation that we might wish to have right now.

Annie Wells: Thank you for that.

Dr Escobar: This is one of my favourite topics, but I will try to keep my comments short. We have done a lot of research on it; we have been doing research with community planning workers—both officers and managers—and the people who work in between, in trying to track over time their situation, the challenges that they face and so on.

The first point to appreciate is that this workforce is often invisible. Everyone knows what a housing officer or transport co-ordinator does but, when you tell someone that you are a community planning official, they may not understand what that is. When something is invisible, it is really difficult to value it. They do the working in between, the brokering, the connecting across sectors and between institutions and communities, which is often invisible work. As I said, if something is not visible, it is often not valued.

Over the past 10 years in Scotland, we have had a paradox whereby we are really rich in community empowerment narrative, but relatively poor in capacity to implement the aspirations of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and other legislation.

What does that mean? It means that community learning and development departments have been cut over the past 10 years, more than in the previous 20. A lot of the capacity that had been built in the early 2000s has been dismantled. There has been a real knock-on effect of public spending cuts, because the first thing that tends to go is the community workforce. There is a real issue there if we are to live up to the aspirations of the community empowerment act, the local governance review, the community wealth building agenda and the planning framework. All those things have community empowerment at their heart, and we need to consider the community workforce.

I will make a final point, which we can go deeper into. In many ways, instead of building a community planning workforce, people have been pulled in from other sections of councils. It is mainly a council-based workforce; partners have not really been able to dedicate as many staff members to it as they would like to. That means that, instead of increasing capacity, in essence, we simply shift capacity across departments, which makes it really hard.

We also have to bear in mind that those workers do not have formal power; they depend on diplomatic skills and soft power to get things done, which is hardest of all—not just within a local authority area or a local council, but across sectors. You find yourself being an official who has no formal power, but who is trying to negotiate very complex issues with chief execs and very senior officials in public institutions, which is a challenging task. The burnout is incredible.

Annie Wells: Thank you very much. I am done now, convener.

The Convener: That was a very interesting response.

We will move to questions on community empowerment, led by Mark Griffin, who joins us online.

Mark Griffin: I will go to Mark McAteer first. The Community Planning Improvement Board said that councils seem to be focused on consultation and engagement, but not necessarily on empowering communities to make decisions. Will you set out for the committee the difference between consultation and engagement, and empowerment? Do you have any examples from across the country of what genuine empowerment looks like?

Mark McAteer: In terms of a definition, consultation is about saying, "Let's have a conservation, but I'll make a decision. I'll use your insight and intelligence to help inform the decision and in the hope that I will get that decision right."

Empowerment, by contrast, is genuinely about what it says on the tin: it is about empowering people and giving them more choice and control over decisions that affect them, their family and their community. It is about allowing them to set the agenda around what the issues are for the public services in their locality and community.

We have a spectrum across the country. I do not think that it is either/or; it is both. If I look back on the time that I have sat on the Community Planning Improvement Board, in terms of the journey that we are on, we would say that things are improving. It is not perfect and we are not there yet—all of us have set out some of the issues and challenges that we face—but we are getting better at it. I do not think that you could find a CPP that would not say that it genuinely wishes to empower communities more. It runs through community planning, but there is no doubt that it is a challenge.

In relation to some of the issues that Oliver Escobar talked about, we are doing this with a constrained resource base, and there are priorities

that therefore have to be set. That is simply a reality that we all have to wrestle with every single day.

There are also challenges within communities in relation to their capability and capacity to work in that empowered fashion. The pandemic taught us a good lesson. Some communities stepped up at pace to enable themselves to work with CPP partners to address the issues around the pandemic. That was a fantastic resource that allowed us to get into households and communities, to access what people needed and to get things to them and so on and so forth.

Other communities have struggled, because they did not have that capability and capacity, so building the capability of communities to work in that fashion is important. That sounds as if I am making an excuse, but I do not mean to. We need empowered individuals, and we need to help people to become empowered in order to work in the ways that empowerment obliges us to.

11:45

There are a lot of challenges in there—different communities have different needs and interests. We are dealing with highly complex issues and, let us be honest, not everyone wants to engage in that kind of conversation. For want of a better expression, we sometimes outsource those decisions, discussions and complexities to politicians. That is why we elect politicians to make those choices and decisions on our behalf as a community. A complex set of issues sit in that area.

I come back to the point that, across the piece, we are on the journey towards empowerment, but there is still much more that we need to do to make it truly work for us. We are getting there, but we are certainly not there yet.

Dr Escobar: Mark McAteer got it right on the differences; it is about the level of power sharing. There are different degrees, from consulting to involving to delegating, and different circumstances and contexts will dictate what is decidable.

We see in our research that some CPPs are good at that, but it is difficult to make a general statement about the quality of community engagement and community empowerment in the community planning world, because the community planning world is not homogeneous. A single CPP is not a thing—it is a network of networks. There are multiple layers and different governance levels, and there are forums that are close to communities and thematic forums that sit somewhere between the local community and the strategic decision-making space.

CPPs are supercomplex networks. Sometimes people think, "Could we do better than having CPPs?" Perhaps we could but, if we did not have them, we would have to invent them, because we need to remember where we were before CPPs. We had hundreds and hundreds of partnerships that have now been co-ordinated under the banner of CPPs that mirror the local authority area boundaries. That is where we were, and we introduced CPPs to try to co-ordinate a bit better and create a space that unified a very dispersed landscape of partnerships.

When you are dealing with a complex network of networks, and you have all the different policy areas and levels of governance, community engagement quality will be patchy. For example, some alcohol addiction forums are excellent, some work with children and young people is excellent and some work on mental health is excellent. You will find good examples in every CPP of sound community engagement, but it is never across the board, because there are multiple spaces. For that, there would need to be far more investment in the community workforce.

I will make a final point on the issue, which connects to the point that Mark McAteer made about the pandemic recovery and the cost of living crisis. CPPs and the places where they need to be should be better supported. I can explain what I mean by that; in essence, I mean seeing the CPP as a primary decision-making and co-ordination arena, rather than as a secondary space. A lot of people who are involved in CPPs see them as secondary spaces, because the real business happens in bilateral meetings between the bigger players. Unless CPPs are seen as the place where business is done, it is difficult to create the incentives for people to collaborate meaningfully and focus on achieving outcomes.

If we had a fully functional system of community planning partnerships, all of a sudden we would have a very decentralised system of governance that could really help in situations such as the pandemic, the climate crisis and the cost of living crisis. It is telling that the Scottish Government has not relied more on CPPs in the post-pandemic recovery. It does not see them as primary spaces—you can see that in the response to the call for public views and in the report on that.

We really need to get back to a place where we think that CPPs are the place to articulate local governance across sectors and with communities, because then they will be given that primary spot, rather than being a secondary space that people are not sure that they should invest their time and money in.

Mark McAteer: Just to build briefly on what Oliver Escobar has said, I think that, as an arena, community planning is a fantastic co-ordination

device. Again, we have seen a lot of evidence, throughout the pandemic and afterwards, of its helping to bring partners together to co-ordinate local activities on the ground.

Governance remains the real challenge, but those involved in community planning are not the primary governors of public services within a locality. Speaking from my organisation's perspective, I would point out that we operate to a national fire and rescue framework for Scotland that sets out the Scottish Government's priorities, and versions of that run through the whole public sector. You have different lines of accountability running across public services; community planning is not necessarily an accountability body in the same sense as I report through the board to the Minister for Community Safety.

There are differences in governance that cut through this and which create certain sets of issues and challenges. Oliver Escobar has a view on whether we should make community planning the primary governance arena for public services. We could do so, but that is not where we are at the moment.

Within those system constraints, a lot of real progress is still being made on the ground with regard to what community planning can do to bring people together. Indeed, if you go below board level down to the more functional partnerships that carry out a CPP's day-to-day work, you will see strength in their operational partnership working and their working with communities in a more empowered fashion than you might imagine from looking at the CPP board only at a strategic level.

It is a complex picture. There are lots of issues, and governance is certainly one of the challenges that we face.

The Convener: Mark, do you have another question?

Mark Griffin: I did, but Mark McAteer and Oliver Escobar have helpfully covered it in their extensive answers. Thanks for that.

The Convener: That is very helpful.

Our third theme is the role of the third sector in community bodies. I call Paul McLennan.

Paul McLennan: Good morning, Mark and Oliver. We have been engaging with each other over in East Lothian for a number of years, and it is good to see you both here.

I have a couple of questions, the first of which is probably for Mark McAteer first of all. Mark, you have been talking about what I suppose you might call the public sector's interpretation of community planning. For me, one of the key things is the difference between public bodies and community bodies—that is, development trusts, housing

associations and so on—and the latter's interpretation of community planning. Is there a disparity in that regard, and if so, could things be strengthened at community organisation level? Can you highlight any good examples of models in other parts of Scotland that might be working?

I will also ask Oliver Escobar to respond to the same question, but I will start with Mark McAteer and give him a chance to build on his last answer.

Mark McAteer: When you think about the bodies that are represented in community planning, you start with the statutory partners that, under the 2015 act, should be around the table. That is very much what drives things across most CPPs. There are other organisations that are, if you like, invited to be part of the CPP, but as I have said, when you go below board level to the functional partnerships—community safety partnerships, drug and alcohol partnerships and so on—you tend to see more anchor organisations functioning. Indeed, I think that that level is where they are very valuable.

Ultimately, the challenge at strategic level is in finding an equilibrium. In other words, what would be the perfect size for a CPP board? What organisations should be on it? If we tried to make decisions with a cast of thousands, it would give rise to even more challenges than we have at present.

I do not think that there is a right or wrong answer to this. If you look across the country, you will see CPPs reaching out. They are not closed shops; they try to engage directly with communities and what Oliver Escobar has described as intermediary bodies. In that respect, I know of some good examples of work on building a food strategy across Dundee. The work builds on what people did through the pandemic, and it very much involves co-production with communities and community bodies.

There is a lot of really good work going on in Renfrewshire on looking post pandemic at the cost of living crisis and what it means for poverty and inequality.

Paul McLennan: Is that discussion happening at a thematic level?

Mark McAteer: Many of those organisations will come together at that level to be part of the decision making that is, in turn, part of community planning itself. I do not think that you need to go far to find really strong examples of this work, but do all those organisations sit at the top table? No, they do not. Do they need to? I am not convinced that they do. What they do happens at that functional level. The value of their being involved in community planning comes from their being engaged, being a part of things and being able to have an influence and make change happen.

Paul McLennan: Oliver, can you respond to the same question?

Dr Escobar: It is interesting. A couple of years ago, just before the pandemic, a delegation of European partners from countries including Denmark, Portugal, Poland and the Netherlands, who were all interested in local governance and how such things are arranged, came over to Glasgow for a peer learning exchange programme. It was quite striking. They really liked the notion of a CPP—a place where we bring different sectors together and there is representation for sectors and communities—but then they started to ask questions. They said, "Okay, what is the budget for a CPP? You're telling us that they cover everything from transport to environment to housing—you name it—so what budget do they have?" We had to reply, "Well, they don't quite have a budget." We explained that, in some places, CPPs manage to pull budgets together for specific projects, but we do not think of them as budget holders and therefore they do not have the capacity to invest in certain things or support their sector interfaces by finding things that they can do together. They depend on the good will of different organisations pulling together budgets for specific projects; they do not have the capacity to be proactive.

Then our visitors asked, "Who are CPPs accountable to?" We said, "Well, each member has a line of accountability to a different body. Some are accountable to a minister and some are locally accountable or accountable to the electorate."

The more we begin to unpick it, the more we see how unusual the local governance construct that we have built here is. That does not mean that CPPs do not have value; I agree with Mark McAteer that they do, and, as I said, if they did not exist we would create something similar. However, we need to realise that we have put CPPs in a position in which they do not have the formal power to do the things that they want to do.

It is not just about CPPs. That is why it is so good that this inquiry is happening. We need to take stock of things in the context of the local governance review, the much-needed reform of community councils and our thinking about how health and social care integration partnerships are working—or, at least in some places, are not working. Once you look across the board, you will begin to see that CPPs will work better—and some work quite well—and more coherently only if the landscape of local governance is reformed more substantially.

That is difficult, because it touches on so many issues that are politically difficult, as everyone here knows. However, we have an on-going local governance review, which I hope will now accelerate and land, and a lot of other things are happening. We need to consider the wholesale picture, because CPPs will be only as good as the local governance context in which they try to operate.

Paul McLennan: Thank you. I will stop there, convener—although the subject is fascinating and I could talk for hours about it.

The Convener: Yes, absolutely. I will ask just one of the questions on my list.

Oliver Escobar, I was interested to hear you talk about CPPs needing to be seen as the places where business can be done. The committee will consider and take evidence on the forthcoming community wealth building bill, and it feels like that is a big dot to join to with this inquiry. If we can get CPPs right, is that where community wealth building should be happening? I see that you are nodding and I would love to hear what you have to say about that.

Dr Escobar: Absolutely. There is an incredible opportunity to join the dots. We know that CPPs work best when they have a shared purpose—or mission, to use the word of the day, with reference to Mariana Mazzucato's approach. They need a clear mission. The best CPPs that I have seen at work are those that have a clear purpose. Some years ago, What Works Scotland did research on how CPPs were helping with the refugees and asylum seekers crisis by housing lots of people. We saw that CPPs had mobilised in their areas with a clear, shared purpose. Again, in the context of Covid, the CPPs that managed to pull together and do incredible co-ordinated work had a clear, shared purpose. Community wealth building could be part of that shared purpose and shared mechanism.

We made the same case for participatory budgeting, which could have been a strong catalyst for CPPs to fall into place and connect the strategic level with the grass roots, bringing communities and institutions together with a shared purpose.

The bill will offer a good opportunity. I suppose that my worry is that there could be a situation such as we had with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. The bill took three years to develop and what we had at the beginning was very different from the bill that was introduced in the Parliament at the end of those three years.

I am worried that there might be silo thinking, because, if community wealth building is to work well, it must cover all the pillars. At the moment, I see a lot of emphasis on the role of the public sector, but I do not see enough on the community investment and community economy side of

things. The bill will be an opportunity to connect the dots.

12:00

My final point is that the research and evidence—not just in Scotland but internationally—are clear that the single most important factor in making partnerships work is a sense of interdependence. Without that, partnerships cannot work. People need to be around the table, either virtually or physically, through membership of partnership boards or thematic groups, and if they feel that they cannot accomplish what they need to accomplish without collaboration with the others around the table, there is no incentive to pull together budgets, change things or break down silos. I could give examples of how you get beyond that, because we have seen it, but it happens in pockets rather than across the board. A sense of interdependence is needed, and the community wealth building agenda can, I hope, create that sense of interdependence, which can lead to a better community-based economy.

The Convener: You might have touched on my next question, which relates a bit more to what happens on the ground. Local outcomes improvement plans are tools for creating that sense of shared purpose. We heard from witnesses last week and this week that LOIPs are the foundation stone and that they are effective if they include a clear set of outcomes and if there is a good data set to allow those outcomes to be measured. Why does that not always happen?

Mark McAteer: There are a range of issues. We should remember the context in which we have been operating. In the period of roughly three years between the legislation being taken through the Parliament and the start of the pandemic, we started to make good progress with LOIPs. People understood what they needed to do on behalf of their community, and the evidence base was building up. At that stage, LOIPs had a strong focus on addressing the underpinning issues that drive inequality, which, in turn, drive much of the demand for statutory, voluntary and other services in a community.

We then hit the pandemic. One of the things that the pandemic exposed—way beyond the data itself—was the level of inequality in Scotland. There was hidden inequality within the statistics, and the pandemic truly exposed just how fragile some of our communities were. A reprioritisation was required at that stage, as we suddenly found that there were issues that we did not think existed, because the evidence base did not tell us that they existed.

That was followed by a cost of living crisis. The pressures within communities are significant, so it is critical that partners across CPPs respond to them. Do they always have the time to develop a well-polished LOIP? No, they do not, but that is not to say that they are not addressing issues that we would expect to see in LOIPs. In some cases, the documentation will have to catch up with the practice that is taking place on the ground across CPPs at the moment.

I go back to Oliver Escobar's point about having a sense of common purpose and mission. Across Scotland, we see strong evidence that CPPs have to work together with others to address some of the issues. For example, inequality drives demand for health services. If you talk to health colleagues, they will tell you that the causes of that demand lie within communities, so they are not divorced from the day-to-day pressures across a community. How those colleagues work with councils and housing associations is a key part of their agenda.

There is a common purpose across CPPs. Has that always translated into well-polished documents? No, it has not, but the evidence still shows that there is some really strong practice across community planning in every locality in Scotland. Those partnerships all have their stories to tell in that regard, but some are just better than others at writing them up.

The Convener: That is a very good point. Some partnerships are good at doing the work, but there might not be the capacity to write it up, given that the most important thing is to deliver the service and meet the needs.

Marie McNair will ask questions on measuring impact, which is the next theme.

Marie McNair: Good afternoon. Thank you for giving us your time.

What evidence is there that community planning efforts are being focused on our most disadvantaged communities? For example, is there any evidence of partnerships using the Improvement Service's community planning outcomes profiles to target interventions and budgets?

Mark McAteer: I specifically asked the Improvement Service whether it had tracked usage of the data in the portal and the answer was no. However, in the work that I have done on the community planning improvement board, I see evidence of the data being used. I speak to people and, along with the various other partners on the body, we talk about such issues. We all make common use of some of that data; my organisation uses some of it. In addition, increasingly, we use data that is provided through Public Health Scotland.

Therefore, we are all aware of the rich sources of data that are out there, but sometimes the data will not exactly fit the specific needs of organisations, because it is fairly generic information about the profile of communities and so forth, and it sometimes does not provide the level of granularity that is needed. There are still challenges around how we join up our data sets to make them more insightful and powerful in the future.

We also need to think about how we make better use of big data, as opposed to public service data, to tell us what is going on in communities. During the pandemic, such data was used in a powerful way to tell us what was going on. For example, we looked at travel information that we could source through Google.

There is more to be done in using such data. However, if I compare where we are now with where we were during my time in community planning, when the first single outcome agreements were pulled together, much stronger use is made of data and evidence to help to paint a picture and tell us what the priorities are.

I think that data is used to define interventions more than it is used to define budgets, for good reason. The budgets of most organisations—this is true of public and private organisations, and it is certainly true of third sector organisations—buy the employment of people. For example, 82 per cent of my organisation's budget goes on staff. That means that I do not have much free budget to put on the table for community planning so that we can say, "Let's go and spend it over there." However, we have staff whom we can deploy, who can work in partnership with other staff from other bodies, which enables us to say, "Let's go and work in Wallacetown," or wherever it might happen to be.

That tends to be how the evidence is used. It is used to help us to decide what to do with the resources that we have to help us to address the issues in communities, rather than being used to free up budget that we can spend in, say, Wallacetown, because most of us do not have free budget to spend.

Good use is made of the evidence, but I think that the Improvement Service intends to pick up the question of how it can better track the usage of the data. Across the sector, we certainly see people using it and talking about it. That is increasingly the case with the Public Health Scotland data that is becoming available as we go.

Marie McNair: Thank you, Mark. Oliver, would you like to respond?

Dr Escobar: Yes. That was one of the issues that we investigated when we did two waves of surveys with community planning officials across Scotland. One of things that we wanted to track was the use of evidence. From those two waves of surveys, we found that people utilise evidence to better understand local challenges, areas of deprivation and—on the more positive side—local assets. We saw improvement in that respect.

However, we come back to the fact that the workforce is under tremendous pressure. We should remember that although some CPPs have large teams—Glasgow's does—many CPPs have only a couple of people. In some cases, they might have only 1.5 staff. Years ago—this might no longer be the case—there was a CPP that had half a person working for it.

Community planning staff need to connect people across sectors, to hold the space of the partnership, to look at the evidence, to mobilise evidence in order to get things going, to organise community engagement processes and so on. You can see where I am going. The use of evidence suffers from the workforce shortages. That connects to a bigger issue to do with the public sector workforce, not just in Scotland but in the United Kingdom. We cannot get away from the issue of what has happened to the public service workforce over the past 10 years, because that has had a ripple effect on community planning.

The same applies to researchers based in councils and some of the other partners, which affects the extent to which CPPs can tap into existing resource. In some places, people are really good at working across the council or bringing in intelligence from fire and police or from the NHS, but that is not the case everywhere. There is not always an ethos of sharing data across organisations. That is still an issue. In addition, the data is sometimes aggregated across an entire area, rather than applying to a specific neighbourhood or community. That is another challenge that the Improvement Service has been trying to address, but it is challenging.

All areas of Scotland have struggled to measure those things for CPPs because of the same issues. It is difficult to get granular data unless we invest in a research agenda, and if we invest in that, we are pulling the money away from the actual implementation of all the projects that CPPs are trying to develop.

The final point I will make on that is that we saw a clear focus on using evidence that was about disadvantaged communities—[*Interruption*.]

Oh, we have a wasp in the building.

Marie McNair: Yes. Hopefully it will stay away.

Dr Escobar: When we asked what the evidence was used for, specifically, CPPs tended to say that it was used to understand the challenges and inequalities that their communities are trying to

cope with. However, the other challenge is that we have the LOIPs—I had a student some years ago who looked at them, and on paper they look quite good—some CPPs have a traffic light system to see how progress is going, and there are locality plans. Those all tend to look okay. However, running in parallel to them are place plans and local plans, which are developed by community groups, community councils and sometimes community anchor organisations, so in the end, what do we measure and how do we evaluate when there is such variety?

Local outcomes improvement plans are supposed to unify all of that and create an umbrella under which all those things can fit, but that is not quite happening; it might be happening in some places, but it is not happening across the board, so a lot of co-ordinating is still needed. There needs to be an acceptance that those plans do not have to come from local authorities and that they can also start from communities themselves when they bring ideas to the table. The CPP could be a channel for them so that there is less duplication and the leadership is shared between the community sector and the public sector.

Marie McNair: The committee heard last week about weaknesses in the data that is available on rural settings, and about a lack of robust data on ethnicity and other equalities characteristics. What needs to be done to improve that?

Mark McAteer: There are a couple of things that we can look at. Organisations and partnerships have a host of administrative data, but we have much more to do on how we improve data collection in rural areas. That includes improving data collection on the ethnicity and equalities characteristics of the people who use services.

More positively, we recently set up Research Data Scotland. Roger Halliday, who is a former chief statistician at the Scottish Government, now leads that organisation. It is charged with working with public and other bodies on how we get more value out of all of the data that we collect; on how we can take that data and cleanse it, so that when we talk about an area we are all talking about the same area and the same community—Oliver Escobar was right about that; and on how we can use that data to better understand communities. Research Data Scotland has a big task ahead in making better use of the data and giving us the insights that joining it up could bring.

I know that the chief statistician has a strong commitment to using the collective resources that sit within the Scottish Government to help to support local partnerships, because those resources are centres of excellence that most of us across the public sector cannot afford to have because of the scale of our requirement.

There is partnership work that will give us more information on the data side of things, but the challenges are significant. Not only do data not align, but systems sometimes do not talk to each other, and trying to find a point of convergence among partners when one system might be the right one is difficult. For example, I might have a contractor with a contract that has another five years to run, and Oliver might have a contract that has two years to run, so we will never be in sync in order to use the same system.

A plethora of day-to-day operational issues that do not make the process easy sit behind all this. Nobody ever set out to design a system for data management and data analysis in Scotland. Therein lies part of the problem: there is no design. Our getting ourselves out of the morass that we are in involves a complicated set of issues, and it will not be easy or quick, but the digital strategies that are emerging give a bit of hope, because we can start a process of convergence so that we are all on the same journey, and can then start to make better use of the information and data that we have.

That sounded like a set of excuses. I did not mean it to; it is just that the situation is difficult and complicated because of the inherited data and technology that we all work with at present.

12:15

Dr Escobar: The university-based research on the subject is very limited, which is striking. I have been in Scotland for 17 years. This is the only country that I know—I work in other countries, as well—where attention to local government and local governance is so scarce. That has a lot to do with local government being seen as secondary; the mentality is that the real business happens at the national level. There is a lack of valuing of local government as an absolute pillar of democracy, of public services and of everything else. Because of that, there is a ripple effect in respect of how we channel research funding in trying to understand issues better. There are a few excellent researchers in Scotland who are looking at the issues, but there is no critical mass of research that we can tap into and connect to the work of the Improvement Service, Audit Scotland and others in order to make the most of it. For me, that has a lot to do with the undervaluing of the role of local government here.

I come originally from Galicia, in Spain, where local government and national Government have parity in the constitution. It is true that sometimes they can be at loggerheads, but local government can also then counter the power of the national Government. The two must negotiate and work closely together, rather than in a top-down and hierarchical way. Here, local government is

sometimes seen as the delivery arm of the national state. I am being a bit facetious in saying that, but I am trying to be a bit provocative because I think that local government is not given its legitimate place in Scotland. With that comes a lack of attention, resource, investment and so on.

On data on equalities and race, there is a knock-on effect. When we have to choose where to put limited research funding, it will sometimes not go towards an issue that it should go to because that issue has not become a priority for bodies. There are ways of overcoming that that have a lot to do with sharing of data. We have examples of how to overcome silos—we mapped some examples in our work years ago. It is necessary to create a situation in which partners in a CPP are persuaded to ignore boundaries and to open up data for sharing. That has a lot to do with the problem of ownership. I do not want to get too academic about this, but there is a mentality that says that certain services and institutions own certain problems. With that comes a lack of shared budgets; the view is that an issue will be for someone specific to tackle, so the budget belongs to them.

I will finish by giving you a specific example. In Glasgow some time ago—we have reports on this, so I will not give a lot of details—there was something called operation modulus, which was led by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. A group of young people were getting themselves into a lot of trouble in a particular area of the city. Social workers were not really managing to act, the police were struggling to act and other partners were struggling to act. What it took for action to happen was a partner being brought in that, in theory, did not have direct ownership of the problem. That created a space in which the young people started to get apprenticeships. There was a two-year programme of working closely with them that considerably reduced all kinds of offending.

That involved a small group, but it shows what can happen when partners across the board do not think in terms of whether a problem is theirs or yours. Instead, the attitude was that there was a shared problem, so resources were shared and the issue tackled in ways that might seem to be unusual. With that comes sharing of budgets and letting go of siloed thinking. That, to me, needs to come from an authorising environment that is created at the national level, and through the kind of inquiry that the committee is doing.

Marie McNair: Thank you.

The Convener: One of our themes is the culture of public bodies. You have touched on that, so we will move on to the next theme, which is national and local leadership.

Willie Coffey: Oliver Escobar mentioned silos a couple of times. Last week, our colleagues from Audit Scotland said that people in CPP leadership should leave their silos, egos and logos at the door. Can you offer the committee a few comments on that from your perspective, Oliver? Perhaps Mark could then offer some views.

Dr Escobar: The research that we have done includes surveys and things like that, but I have also spent a lot of my time over the past 14 years shadowing community planning officials and observing community planning boards. Some of them work very well, but some of them are rubber-stamping in places where not a lot happens. I do not want to name names, but there is research out there that shows the ones that are really trying to be genuine and the ones that are spaces for the kind of posturing that you are alluding to.

That comes down to the cultures of the various organisations around the table, or to the style of leadership, which can be a bit personal. At the personal level, it makes a huge difference whether there is a traditional authoritative leader or a more facilitative leader, who is less about command and control and is more about facilitation, mediation and collaboration.

At the organisational level, sometimes people sit at the table without having been empowered by their organisation to get things going; they are there just to carry messages between the organisation and the CPP. There is a real question about how seriously the NHS and other organisations take CPPs and whether they can leave the logos, egos and so on at the door. Some do, but that depends on the people and culture of the local authority.

Willie Coffey: Who decides who the leaders are? Are they appointed from the top, or do they emerge from among local people? Who empowers the leaders?

Dr Escobar: I will have a quick go at answering, then hand over to Mark McAteer.

There are statutory members—a typical CPP board will have the leader of the council. In some places, we also see opposition councillors. They will include the chief executive of the third sector interface and, in some cases where there is a federation in the local authority area, there will be community councillors. There will be senior people from various organisations across business and other sectors. Those are the statutory members. In the best CPPs there are also leaders who are brought in from the community and the third sector—we have seen some CPPs over the years making space for them.

However, it is a mixed blessing. If you are from a community anchor organisation or a network of third sector organisations, you must be careful

about the decision whether to put your time into being on a board on which you might not get much done, or into other spaces. It comes back to the point that if the CPP is a place where a lot of business—not all the business, but a lot of it—actually happens, there is an incentive for that space to become more inclusive, because people will be able to invest their time there.

Mark McAteer: I will touch on a couple of things. I suppose that it is worth asking why we get silos. If Audit Scotland's observation is right—that we should leave silos, logos and egos at the door—what drives us in the first place? Scotland and the UK as a whole remain very centralised political systems. That sits at the core of a lot of what happens.

There have been on-going tensions, not just recently but over the decades, around community planning. We can go right back to the reform of local government in the 60s and 70s and the tension between whether we should create an integrationist model for public service delivery or sectoral models. We go back and forward on that over time; it is an on-going challenge.

Clearly, community planning is about an integration model, but there is no homogeneous model across the whole public sector in Scotland with regard to policy making. That remains a key driver for what happens in many of the public bodies and partners that you talked about. We exist in silos that are, ultimately, driven by a policy system that is linked to Government and to a particular cabinet secretary. That is the tram line that bodies are set on, but they are asked, at the same time, to integrate and work in partnership with others.

The system remains fragmented, but there is strong evidence that despite that, a lot of strong local partnership working is taking place and there is a strong drive to integrate and share resources locally.

Sometimes, we have to work around the system rather than redraw the system. The system is highly complicated and there are issues of governance and accountability that cut through all of it. Not all of that is within our gift, at the community planning level. A lot of it still sits with the Parliament and the Government, and there are big questions and choices about what kind of public service system we wish to have in Scotland. Clarity on that and being able to resolve some of the issues might help to break down some of the silos that Audit Scotland sees when it looks at CPPs. It is not all the fault of CPPs, in that sense.

Willie Coffey: Thank you both for that.

The Convener: I will continue on the theme of national and local leadership. We have another

five minutes. I hope that you can work with me on that, although it is a big topic.

I am interested to hear whether there is, at the national level, sufficient leadership on and support for community planning. What more can be done at the local level to ensure that leadership meets the requirements of the 2015 act? What is the role of local councillors, for example?

Mark McAteer: At the national level, there is a lot of on-going work around collaborative forms of leadership. The Scottish Leaders Forum—SLF—brings together, from across the whole public service system, representation at strategic senior level. Within that, we have set up various arrangements for working on issues almost on a learning basis. We might, for example, resolve to tackle a wicked issue and to work together as a group to do so.

A programme—Columba 1400, which I have been on—is under way to support the work that is done through the SLF, supported by the Hunter Foundation and the Scottish Government. It is a very different form of leadership development, based on bringing people together to talk about common issues and problems. The intention behind the programme is that people use such interventions to break down barriers there, then—hopefully—break down the barriers back in their workplaces. There is work on-going at that level.

At the local level, much of the consideration is about resources and priorities. In difficult times, as Oliver Escobar noted earlier, learning and development budgets tend to be among the first things to go. Finding the capacity and the resources at a point in time when the budget is under pressure remains a real challenge for local individual partners. We then do not do the leadership development; typically, we try to get people to work together locally to compensate. I do not think that we are doing enough at that level; we could do more. It always comes down to who pays for it, because the costs are big.

Dr Escobar: I will try to be brief. I am living up to the academic stereotype of talking too much, so I apologise for that.

I will make two quick points. First, when it comes to attention from the Scottish Government and national bodies, community planning is not the kind of thing on which people are prepared to spend political capital. Similarly, we have not reformed community councils for 50 years because people are not prepared to spend political capital on what are very difficult issues. There is a ripple effect from that in respect of the quality of local governance and of what CPPs and other bodies can achieve.

It is not as if ministers will get a lot of kudos for getting community planning reform to go well. The

closest we got to that was when it was part of the Christie commission agenda, which we participated in for 10 years. There is still an investment of political capital to be made, with hard yards of investment to put in while knowing that community planning is not the kind of issue that will bring political kudos. That is not easy.

Secondly, and finally, the thing that makes a massive difference in working with local leaders in communities—community leaders as well as formal leaders in institutions—is when people start to think about power in a different way. Often, we think about power as a zero-sum game: "If I share power, I lose power." We need to start thinking that sometimes when we share power we can create power that was not there before. We see that through participatory budgeting and through CPPs, for instance. If a councillor, or a body of councillors, shares the power that they have, they can be part of a set of partners that has the capacity to act on complex issues. They can generate a form of power that they did not previously have when formally acting as councillors, before they shared power to act on issues.

We need to start thinking of power as productive, not just as restrictive. When people share power, they can generate capacity that they did not have before. If leaders across the board understand that power sharing can form part of the improvements and be part of what they are trying to achieve, they can get themselves into a better mindset, not just for community planning but for community empowerment more broadly, and have a chance of moving forward.

The Convener: Thank you very much for those responses. We are doing work on the local governance review; perhaps we will need you to come back and speak to us more about that. What you have highlighted connects to the work on the new deal for local government. You spoke earlier in your evidence about parity and how to get there. You made some interesting points about who is willing to take the steps that are required.

Your evidence has been very helpful—indeed, it has helped to create a broader context for the evidence from our previous panels.

12:29

Meeting suspended.

12:36

On resuming—

Subordinate Legislation

Non-Domestic Rates (Miscellaneous Anti-Avoidance Measures) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [Draft]

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is evidence on draft regulations from Tom Arthur, the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth. Mr Arthur is joined by Scottish Government officials James Messis, who is the policy team leader, and Stephen Rees, who is a solicitor in the legal directorate. I welcome you all to the meeting and invite the minister to make an opening statement.

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): Good afternoon. The draft instrument under consideration is quite technical, but simply put, its intention is to assist councils from 1 April 2023 in tackling known non-domestic rates avoidance arrangements.

The measures that are set out in the regulations are unique in the UK. Tax avoidance in non-domestic rates takes place when a ratepayer seeks to reduce or avoid the liability on their property through activity that, although permissible within the existing legal framework, is not in keeping with the spirit of non-domestic rates law.

In 2017, the independent Barclay review of non-domestic rates recommended that a general anti-avoidance rule be created to make it harder for loopholes to be exploited. Subsequently, the Non-Domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020 provided powers that enable Scottish ministers to make regulations

"with a view to preventing or minimising advantages arising from non-domestic rates avoidance arrangements that are artificial".

The relevant terms are defined in the 2020 act.

We committed to utilising those powers, including in the programme for government 2021-22 and the Bute house agreement. The draft regulations that are before the committee deliver on those commitments. They aim to strike the right balance between empowering councils to tackle rates avoidance and allowing property owners and occupiers to engage in business practices that are carried out for a reason other than simply tax avoidance.

The first target of the regulations is the artificial use of insolvency, particular leasing arrangements and shell companies. Within prescribed circumstances, councils will be able to make the

owners, rather than the occupiers, of non-domestic properties liable for the payment of rates. In those circumstances, non-domestic rates relief awarded to the property would cease.

The regulations have a number of built-in safeguards to protect legitimate operators. First, the triggers for the transfer of rates liability are not actionable unless it is a non-domestic rates advantage, such as an outstanding non-domestic rates liability. Further, the circumstances in which a council may transfer the rates liability from the occupier to the owner of the property are carefully defined and include tenancies that are not on a commercial basis, insolvency in conjunction with other artificial indicators, and specific characteristics and behaviours of the occupier.

Councils must notify the property owner of any intention to transfer the rates liability to them and must provide an opportunity for the owner to make representations before a final determination is made. Only if there has been a similar offence within the past five years can there be a retroactive transfer of liability from the start of a given artificial lease agreement.

The second target of the draft regulations is rates avoidance through a reduction in rateable value by making deliberate physical changes to the state of a property solely for the purpose of reducing the rates liability. That can include intentional property destruction. The conditions for the use of the relevant power are set out in the regulations and are necessary to support the devolution to councils of the responsibility for empty property relief.

As is the case with the other provisions in the regulations, it is not intended to target legitimate enterprise. In all instances in which the council questions the appropriateness of any arrangement, the owner will have the opportunity to demonstrate its commercial rationale.

The draft regulations were subject to consultation with industry experts and practitioners, including assessors and local authorities, through the Institute of Revenues Rating and Revaluation. I thank everyone who engaged with Government officials on that.

Tax avoidance reduces public revenues and is unfair to the majority of ratepayers, who do not engage in such practices. The presence of avoidance behaviours can also undermine public confidence in the non-domestic rates system and lead to reduced rates of compliance. It is not just appropriate but necessary that we bring forward regulations to tackle tax avoidance where we can and ensure greater fairness and transparency in the non-domestic rates system. As such, the regulations support the principles of the Scottish Government's "Framework for Tax" and align with the strategic objectives that the framework contains.

I hope that members agree with me and will support the draft instrument.

The Convener: Thank you for your opening statement, minister.

Can you provide any indication of the scale of non-domestic rates income that is currently being lost as a result of the avoidance measures that are covered by the regulations? Can you indicate the number of cases that are expected to be dealt with under the regulations?

Tom Arthur: I ask James Messis to provide background on that.

James Messis (Scottish Government): There is limited data on the number of avoidance practices that are being engaged in. We have examples of individual cases as well as anecdotal evidence, but, across Scotland, we just do not have the data, I am afraid.

Willie Coffey: Is there any risk that the regulations might result in the incorrect classification of genuine situations as avoidance? For example, let us suppose that a tenancy agreement was signed and the occupier genuinely became insolvent after that. How would the owner be able to demonstrate that that was not an avoidance mechanism?

Tom Arthur: Sufficient flexibility is built into the regulations so that the local authority, as the effective tax authority, can engage with owners, and there is an opportunity for owners to engage following a local authority's giving of a notice. I ask James Messis to expand on that slightly.

James Messis: It is also worth pointing out that, in the circumstances of insolvency, which Willie Coffey raised, there are safeguards in the regulations. A notable safeguard is that, as well as insolvency being entered into within 12 months of the lease being signed, the non-domestic property must continue to be occupied and used commercially. Another is for the property to continue to be in receipt of non-domestic rates relief—that it is continuing to receive an advantage.

However, as the minister has set out, there is a process for an individual who has received a notice to provide evidence that their arrangement is not for the purposes of an artificial advantage.

Annie Wells: Good afternoon, minister. Is the dispute mechanism in the regulations sufficiently robust? In addition, if an owner, occupier or tenant challenges the local authority's decision on the rates bill but the decision is not overturned, what further course of action is open to them if they are still dissatisfied with the decision?

Tom Arthur: I think that the dispute mechanism is robust and that it provides sufficient flexibility. It is also important to recognise the impact on ratepayers. Avoidance measures are fundamentally unfair and disadvantage people who engage in legitimate practice.

I ask James Messis to address your specific points about the dispute mechanism and what recourse there is in the event that an occupier disagrees with a local authority.

12:45

James Messis: When an individual first receives a notice, they will have 28 days to reply to it, setting out why they do not think that their arrangement provides an artificial advantage. Subsequently, the local authority will have a further 28 days to respond, consider the information and evidence and provide a final notice. When an individual disagrees with the final determination, they can apply for an internal review within the local authority. If they disagree with the determination of the internal review, they can pursue that through the courts by judicial review.

Marie McNair: What is the scale of the administrative burden that is expected to be faced by local authorities in implementing the regulations? Will local authorities have the resources to undertake action under the regulations?

Tom Arthur: Local authorities are responsible for the administration. More generally—it is not specific to this matter—resource has been provided to local government in recent financial settlements for the reforms that have been implemented due to the Barclay review.

James, do you have anything to add?

James Messis: The intention of the regulations is to protect revenue. Local authorities have been asking for that. Further, the instances of avoidance are not so prevalent that they would potentially create an administrative burden.

Marie McNair: Thank you for that clarification.

The Convener: I thank the minister and his officials for their evidence.

Item 4 is consideration of the motion on the instrument. I invite the minister to move motion S6M-07676.

Motion moved,

That the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee recommends that the Non-Domestic Rates (Miscellaneous Anti-Avoidance Measures) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[*Tom Arthur*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: The committee will publish a report setting out its recommendations on the instrument in the coming days.

Council Tax (Discounts) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2023 (SSI 2023/25)

Non-Domestic Rating (Valuation of Sites of Reverse Vending Machines) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 (SSI 2023/26)

12:47

The Convener: The next item on our agenda is consideration of two negative instruments. There is no requirement for the committee to make any recommendations on negative instruments. As there are no comments from members, are we agreed that the committee does not wish to make any recommendations in relation to the instruments?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting. We move into private session.

12:48

Meeting continued in private until 12:50.

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