



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

**Tuesday 23 May 2023**

**Session 6**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Tuesday 23 May 2023**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>COMMUNITY COUNCILS .....</b>	<b>2</b>

---

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
**15<sup>th</sup> 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)

\*Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)

\*Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

John Bachtler (Cambuslang Community Council)

Barry Cathie (Royal Burgh of Rutherglen Community Council)

Brian Davey (Improvement Service)

Debra Duke (Moray Council)

Dr Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh)

Alastair Kennedy (Joint Community Councils of Moray)

Steve Kerr (Edinburgh Association of Community Councils)

Ewart McAuslane (Tillicoultry, Coalsnaughton and Devonside Community Council)

Shayne McLeod (Association of Shetland Community Councils)

Andrew Paterson (Scottish Community Development Centre)

Bill Pitt (New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan Community Council)

Donald Stavert (Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian)

Emma Swift (Improvement Service)

Jackie Weaver (Cheshire Association of Local Councils)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Euan Donald

**LOCATION**

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)



## Scottish Parliament

### Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Tuesday 23 May 2023

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]*

#### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Ariane Burgess):** Good morning and welcome to the 15th meeting in 2023 of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. We have received apologies from Annie Wells. I remind all members and witnesses to ensure that their devices are on silent and that all other notifications are turned off during the meeting.

The first item on our agenda is to decide whether to take items 3 and 4 in private. Do we agree to do that?

*Members indicated agreement.*

## Community Councils

09:30

**The Convener:** Under agenda item 2, we will take evidence on community councils from two panels of witnesses. This year marks 50 years since the passing of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, which created community councils to bridge the gap between local authorities and communities. We are taking the opportunity to hear about how community councils are working in Scotland, to look at good practice and at how we could make community councils more effective. It is important to acknowledge that they exist and that a tremendous amount of volunteer time goes into them.

For our first panel, we are joined in the room by Brian Davey and Emma Swift, both of whom are communications officers from the Improvement Service. Along with them is Dr Oliver Escobar, senior lecturer in public policy at the University of Edinburgh. Online we are joined by Andrew Paterson, policy and research officer from the Scottish Community Development Centre, and Jackie Weaver, the chief officer at the Cheshire Association of Local Councils.

We have a number of questions, and I will start with a question for everyone in general. First, however, I need to say a couple of things. Those who are in the room do not need to operate your microphones. We will do that for you. If you want to come in on something, just indicate to me or Kath Byrne, the committee clerk. Jackie Weaver and Andrew Paterson, if you want to come in, please put an R in the chat function.

I am interested to hear what you think are the strengths of community councils in Scotland and what role they could play in democratic renewal at a local level. What proportion of the Scottish population is covered by community councils and has that changed in recent years? Do you get the sense that they are more prevalent in certain areas than in others? I will start with Oliver Escobar.

**Dr Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh):** That is three questions in one. Hello, everyone. Andrew Paterson is here as well, and Andrew and I, with Paul Nelis, worked on a report on community councils, which I think is referred to in the meeting papers. We tried to focus on strengths because community councils often attract a lot of criticism and sometimes that is unfair, because they are doing a lot of work with very little resource and very limited support.

The strength of community councils is that they are the lowest tier of local democracy in Scotland. Those community councils that work well are very

tuned into what happens in their communities and can be a very effective bridge into all kinds of local institutions and between communities of place and local institutions. That includes the local authority and other policy areas such as health, social care and so on. The reality, however, is that the landscape is very patchy and uneven across the country—that goes to the question about coverage. My colleagues from the Improvement Service will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that there are around 1,200 community councils. Not all of them have members and many of them do not have contested elections. It is a very patchy picture.

The final point that I will make is that it is easy to focus on weaknesses and limitations and people do that a lot. Community councils attract a lot of unfair criticism. It is great that we are here to celebrate their 50-year anniversary. Any institution that is put in the situation that community councils have been put in over the past 50 years would struggle, so it is almost a miracle that they are still trying to do what they are trying to do.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. Does anybody else have any reflections on the strengths of community councils in Scotland and what role they could play in democratic renewal at local level? Perhaps we will focus on that.

**Emma Swift (Improvement Service):** Oliver Escobar is right that it is very easy to focus on the troubles that community councils have. The Improvement Service has a website where we try to celebrate some of the great stories that come out of councils. One of the things that struck home to me was what an important role they played during Covid. They were often on the ground, either providing resources or co-ordinating resources to help those in the community who were in struggling, which shows that they have a role to play in resilience. Community councils in areas that are affected by flooding have set up community resources to help with that, so if there are power cuts there is a place where people can go. They have done that without the resources that local authorities can get.

On democratic renewal, as Oliver Escobar said, they are the lowest tier of democracy. If people are looking to make the move into becoming a councillor, or even a Member of the Scottish Parliament, starting off as a community councillor is a good way to go. That should be promoted more, especially to young people, as a career path. If you are interested in politics, get involved with your local community council at that lowest level.

**The Convener:** Thank you. Does anybody else want to come in on this question?

**Brian Davey (Improvement Service):** I echo what Emma Swift said. They are the most local tier of democracy and their strength is that they are people who care about their community and they want to make a difference.

**Dr Escobar:** Could I add a very small thing? I know that we have colleagues online waiting.

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Dr Escobar:** It is worth saying that community councils are non-partisan; it is community politics and that is great. That is refreshing and can unlock all kinds of possibilities. In Scotland, they are increasingly playing a very important role in other democratic innovations, such as participatory budgeting. We need to highlight that they are often behind a lot of exciting developments in local renewal. Community development trusts are another area where they are increasingly contributing. I am sure that we will come on to that, because one of the things that we need to improve is how connections are made and how people are empowered to unlock a lot of the potential out there, through those kinds of organisations and networks.

**Andrew Paterson (Scottish Community Development Centre):** They have a unique role in the sense that they are, as Oliver Escobar mentioned, a bridge between communities and public authorities, as well as working with local community organisations. They are distinct, however, in that they are open to other people attending their meetings and standing for election and they have quite a formal role, which is different to other community organisations. That is important.

**The Convener:** Thank you for pointing that out. Jackie Weaver, I have a question for you. I am interested to hear what you think the strengths are of the system in England, particularly as it compares to Scotland. We could probably be here all day hearing about that, but if you can give us some highlights that would be great.

**Jackie Weaver (Cheshire Association of Local Councils):** Apologies. Do cut me off at any point. It is very interesting listening to you talk about the strengths of your community councils because, of course, those are exactly the strengths of our town and parish councils. However, in England we back them up by giving them the resources that your community councils do not have. It is very interesting to hear that they are valued in Scotland, yet they are kept in line in some ways, so they have no autonomy.

Over my 25-year career, there has been an enormous change in England. Twenty-five years ago, our town and parish councils were very much like your community councils except that they had tax raising powers, although they did not do very

much with them. We have seen central Government funding for our principal authorities in England reduce dramatically and we have seen town and parish councils stepping up and filling the gaps. Those very community-based things make a huge difference. People think that the biggest issue for people might be highways, adult social care, hospitals and so on. Of course, those things are hugely important, but the thing that really impacts people's daily lives is what happens next door to you. That is more important to most people than anything else and that is where our town and parish councils come into their own.

There was mention made of participatory budgeting. We have tinkered with that at the edges but it does not go terribly far down here. It feels like paying lip service to something. We are tending to move away from that and move towards parish and town councils being the pump primers for all sorts of community activities. One of the things that surprises me over and over again is how much can be achieved in the local community with very little money, but when you look at a principal authority getting involved in it, the costs just grow exponentially. The infrastructure that follows that, the rules and regulations and so on, mean that everything that you try to do is expensive, but locally, so much can be achieved with so little money.

**The Convener:** That is an interesting point. I am interested to go a little bit further. You said that in England, around 25 years ago, parish councils started to use their tax raising powers for local levies. What kind of things did they bring about? What did they tax people on and was there resistance to that?

**Jackie Weaver:** It is interesting. The assumption is that anybody trying to raise money by tax will be attacked: nobody likes paying tax. One of the unique points about a town or parish council, however, is that you can see that every penny that is raised is spent locally.

We pay our tax, as we all do, and it seems to go into this black hole—I am not talking about potholes, although that is also true—and it disappears. You are never sure what happens to it and you are always convinced that your neighbour is getting a better slice of the pie than you are.

With a local tax from a town or parish council, you can see exactly where it is spent. We have had a number of local examples—unfortunately, we still have to calculate in percentage terms—where the increase in tax has been as high as 75 per cent. You would think that everybody would be up in arms about that, but the parish council said, “This is what we are going to do with the 75 per cent increase; do you support it?”

The other thing that we are able to do is borrow money. We have a number of councils that take on large infrastructure projects. Clearly, if you are a parish council with perhaps 10,000 electors, you will not be able to raise half a million pounds just through your council tax without it having a serious impact on a household's budget. We are able to borrow money and we are seeing an increase in the amount of money that our town and parish councils are borrowing to deliver serious infrastructure.

**The Convener:** Thanks for that. That is useful and very interesting. Ivan McKee has some questions.

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** Good morning. It is interesting to hear Jackie Weaver talking about the change over that 25-year period south of the border. If you go back 24 years here we had the McIntosh commission that raised a number of points and made the statement that

“Scotland today simply does not have a system of local government, in the sense in which many other countries do.”

I am interested to get your perspective on whether things have moved on in that time, or whether we are still back with the challenges we had a quarter of a century ago. I hate to throw your words back at you, Dr Escobar, but I think that you said something very similar this morning about the presence or legitimacy of community councils being patchy and contested across the country. I want to get your reflections on both of those points.

**Dr Escobar:** They are related. There are two sides to this. On the one hand, I think that having elections to choose community councils is a very imperfect mechanism. I am not saying that we should do away with the elections but I think that there are other modes of selection that should be complementary and there is a strong case for reform in that area.

Legitimacy also goes alongside the extent to which a community council can make a difference in its community, and can therefore attract attention, support and a diversity of people from the community to join the community council and make a difference. There is a virtuous circle when you can make a difference and therefore, by increasing your capacity to make a difference locally, you increase your legitimacy to act and increase the diversity of your community council because more people are attracted to it.

09:45

At the moment we are not in a virtuous circle; we are in a vicious circle, as community councils sometimes struggle to attract a diversity of people from their community, to some extent because

they do not have a lot of power to do the things that they want to do. Those who have the right conditions tend to look at other mechanisms, like setting up a community development trust because we do not have tax-raising powers or borrowing powers. If you have a good idea for a project or want to take over a community asset, which might be a revenue-generating asset that could bring community wealth, you cannot do it under the existing legal arrangement around what a community council is.

You can see how there is some strength to the legitimacy critique, whether they are viewed as being illegitimate because they are not diverse enough or because they do not have enough contested elections, but it is not a fully persuasive argument because the legitimacy depends on having the capacity to act. If they cannot do things that people might see would improve their lives, it is difficult to expect them to attract people and to become the diverse, vibrant and dynamic spaces that make things happen for their communities.

We need to break that vicious circle and there are ways of doing it. Some councils have done it, but across the board there is a lot that can be done to put them in a better place to do what they want to do. It involves trying to respond to the level of aspiration that there is but also just giving them the support to fulfil the responsibilities that they already have, because at the moment they are having to fulfil their responsibilities with—going by the last time I checked—around £500 for admin support. That might have changed. There are exceptions: some time ago, East Lothian Council used to give a bit more and other places do that, too, but you can see how they cannot fulfil even the duties that they have at the moment, let alone the aspirations that they are trying to reflect as they try to bring in their communities to put forward a positive vision for their places.

**Emma Swift:** On what has changed, the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 created community councils as unincorporated bodies, which is why they cannot do community asset transfers. It also excludes them from some funding applications. The conditions of funding applications sometimes say, “You must be an incorporated body”. What has changed recently is that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has brought in some new elements that community councils can get involved in and it has given them a little bit more locus. There are things such as local place plans that they can get involved in and use to create ideas about what they want in their local community, with the idea that the local authority can then take some of those ideas forward. However, they are always reliant on other people to take those ideas forward because of the restrictions that have been placed on them right from the start.

**Jackie Weaver:** I will pick up on Dr Escobar’s point about support. One of the things that is absolutely essential for us to succeed as a movement is proper support. We have 10,000 parish councils and an army of about 7,500 clerks who manage those, but, again, I think sometimes our principal authorities are anxious about what that means, and they worry that it will cost a fortune to support them. My organisation is repeated 40 times across the shire counties. We provide support, advice, guidance, help and so on to about 240 parish councils in Cheshire, and that costs our principal authorities £7,000 a year. We are talking peanuts, but what it delivers on the ground because of the way that we work is something really exceptional. It does not succeed if you do not support it, but supporting it does not necessarily mean that you will bankrupt yourself.

**Ivan McKee:** I want to follow up on that and a point that you made earlier about the different costs to deliver services if you are doing it at the parish level compared to the traditional route, things are done at a council level. Can you put any more colour on that—more specifics? Perhaps you can send in some more numerical examples of that later? I would like to understand the quantum and see some examples of that.

**Jackie Weaver:** There are many examples. A lot of our parishes, but not all of them, are in rural areas, and a lot of Scotland is rural, of course. I come from a fairly rural part of my area. By definition, that is difficult for our principal authorities to manage because the community is not centralised and there is not a great population, but there is enormous community spirit. When grass on verges is not cut using the mechanisms that cut them in towns, it is cut by local farmers, out of good will.

Even if contractors are employed, people have personal relationships with those contractors and they work for a fraction of the cost. At the moment, we get a lot of devolution of services here, again because the principal authority is struggling for money and is offloading anything that is not money generating. When it hives off a village hall or even a town hall, the running costs for it just fall through the floor because we are no longer looking at, for example, the kind of pay rates that were in place before. We can easily leverage in volunteer support and so on. It is difficult to quantify, but I think that you get what I am saying.

**Ivan McKee:** Absolutely. I have seen examples of that in my constituency, where an asset was not viable when the council ran it but ran perfectly well when a local group took it over.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** Good morning. I want to get your thoughts on the relationship between the community councils and the local authorities in Scotland and

perhaps hear some reflections on the strengths and weaknesses there. I know from the 2019 report that support featured prominently, and Dr Escobar mentioned it in an answer to one of the convener's opening questions. Could you give some reflections on how you see the roles of and the liaison between the two bodies in Scotland? I will come to Jackie Weaver later for her perspective on how that works down south.

**Dr Escobar:** I am talking about research, but we have been looking into community councils since 2010, so I am basing this as well on what I understand of the various relationships across local authority areas. In most local authority areas within democratic services there is an officer who, as one of a number of roles, takes on a co-ordination or communication role in relation to community councils. That works better in some places than it does in others.

It often comes down to the person, which is not ideal because you want consistency. It comes down to the person because, in many local authorities, there is a culture of misunderstanding community councils and in some cases there have been relationships that did not work. There are many factors around that. I do not want to dwell too much on it, but in the places where it works well it is because people are making a choice to have a positive relationship—they see the potential of having a constructive relationship.

We have massive local authority areas—we have spoken about this before in this committee. They are the largest in the developed world, and in many other countries they would be considered to be regional authorities rather than local authorities. Given that situation, community councils are uniquely placed to be closer to communities of place, and in that context local authorities often have to rely on community councils as a bridge to those communities.

When you have limited support—clerk time is very limited—and are dependent on the local authority to do anything that you might want to do, that puts you in a difficult position when you are trying to offer some constructive challenge, and to play your role as representatives of local people. That means that, in some places, the relationships over time have gone in the wrong direction, but we also see examples of places where the system works really well and people connect.

Earlier, I gave the example of participatory budgeting because now, in the north-east, as part of the just transition programme, there is a participatory budgeting programme where the three local authority areas, community councils and third sector interfaces are coming together to advance environmentally oriented and climate-action oriented participatory budgeting—you will probably hear about that later from the panel of

community councils. That is a great example of good relationships and good collaboration built over time between community councils, local authorities and so on, but that is happening despite the circumstances and arrangements and the lack of autonomy and independence, rather than because they are set to work well together.

I think that it is fair to say that some elected members at local level do not necessarily see community councils as something that they need to engage with meaningfully. Some of them do—I have seen many elected local councillors who do—but in many situations community councils are seen as an impediment. It is a chicken-and-egg situation, or a contradictory situation, because when community councils say something that a local authority likes, the local authority will tick the community engagement box and say that the community council said it. However, when the community council is saying something that the local authority does not like, the local authority will say, "The community council is unrepresentative, lacks diversity, lacks legitimacy and we are not going to listen to it."

Community councils do not have autonomy, their own assets, their own infrastructure or their own capacity to take on initiatives. That means that they cannot go very far with challenge because they depend on good relationships. You can see how making things complicated is a little bit challenging.

**Willie Coffey:** Thanks. Brian Davey or Emma Swift, do you have any contributions on the relationship and what needs to improve between the community councils and the local councils?

**Brian Davey:** The Improvement Service manages a network of community council liaison officers—CCLOs—and we are in regular contact with them. As Oliver Escobar said, sometimes it is not their main job to support community councils, so that is clearly an issue.

You mentioned the clerk system earlier. Shetland has had its own clerk system since the 1970s. That seems to work very well and across the country people are thinking that that is a luxury in Shetland. That could be replicated. I think that, when Jackie Weaver was talking about the situation in England, Oliver Escobar was thinking that it is a luxury to have all those clerks.

**Andrew Paterson:** I will talk a little bit about support. It may be worth pointing out that, when we have been working on the participation request work around the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, we tend to see that it fits with the picture that Oliver Escobar described. Sometimes, if a community council raises a challenge about something that it does not like,

the local authority does not have the will to work with that.

We want to see more support for public bodies to engage with community councils because there sometimes seems to be a difficulty in seeing the outcome approach that you can take where interests usually align. People want the same things to happen, and just because a complaint or a challenge comes in, that does not mean that, at the end of the day, there is unwillingness to work together for the same improved outcomes. I think that we need training across the board for that.

**Willie Coffey:** Thank you. Jackie Weaver, could you offer a perspective on the relationship between the parish councils and the local authorities down south?

**Jackie Weaver:** There are two issues. One is that, as I said before, the organisation that I work for—the Cheshire Association of Local Councils—is replicated throughout the country. Apart from providing support for our town and parish councils, we also provide the mechanism for communication with town and parish councils. There will be many occasions when the principal authority needs to go directly to a parish because something is a parish issue, but, in general, when they engage with parish councils they do that through us, as we are seen as a trusted and independent body. That mechanism works very well. Then, when you have all those challenging people from the community who want to talk about something local, they basically pass them on to us, so that gets rid of a whole workload. That works well.

10:00

What tends to work less well is the relationship with our elected members. We have two schools of elected members in the principal authority, as it were—it is not a party political divide. Members of one school are incredibly supportive and work well with their town or parish councils—there is usually a group of them within their ward. That is great. That is when the relationship is at its best.

The members of the other school are in competition for voters. We often see what we call dual-hatted members, with the principal authority member also being a member of the parish council. In those cases, there is a lack of trust and a lack of working together in partnership—it feels like a power grab, if that makes sense. That is incredibly difficult to work with. In that instance, the sort of member that I am describing is like a block. Rather than seeing the parish council as being 10 people to share their workload with, they view them as 10 people who they are competing with in order to showcase themselves. If I could make one rule—I would probably make several, but if I could make one—it would be that you are not

allowed to have dual-hatted members, because we should recognise each other's strengths and weaknesses and work together rather than grabbing the jobs.

**Willie Coffey:** That is interesting. One hat is better than two, I suppose.

That discussion leads me on to my second question, which is about whether community councils have proper access to expertise and resources, particularly in the planning process. I well remember my experience in attending my local community council some years ago. The community councillors were bombarded with planning papers, with little or no assistance to help them get through it. Has that changed, or is it pretty much the same? Could we improve that situation to provide direct access to expertise and resources to enable community councils to play a full and proper part in the local planning process?

Maybe Dr Escobar will kick off on that again.

**Dr Escobar:** I will kick off, but I am sure that the Improvement Service might have something to add, given the work that it does in offering training and so on. When we did the research with community councillors in workshops, surveys and so on, they noted that they would appreciate more support to develop a wide range of skills and to access expertise. The top thing on their list was to develop more expertise on public and community engagement and the ability to bring their communities together to work out plans and priorities to take things forward.

Community councils are a statutory body in the planning process. The work that they undertake for their communities often goes unseen and is underappreciated. In some places, they might have ad hoc access to someone in the council, who might help, but that is not systematic and is not across the board. Community councils just need to find their own way through a maze of things that they might have never seen before. That is another case where they are not supported enough to do the things that they are supposed to do.

Over the years, there have been some training programmes on planning and finance, so I am not saying that nothing has happened, but it is not systematic enough and is not available to everyone. Also, it is not just about training. Ideally, you want community councils to have access to local institutions such as colleges and expertise that might be available in local businesses, as well as expertise in the council. Because community councils do not have that convening power or stature as well-known and respected community representatives, it is difficult to mobilise expertise and capacity, and that is left to individual relationships. If a community council has members

who have professional backgrounds, they might have the networks and be in a better position, but that is unfair to communities where some of the expertise might not be available. We need to get better at being systematic.

We should also remember that it is not just about expertise in planning or finance. We need to pay attention to the other side of this, which is community councils' expertise in organising and mobilising their communities so that local authorities, the national health service and other bodies that come knocking on the door know that they are in the right place and that community councils are a bridge to their communities. That takes a lot of community organising and development work.

As I said in a previous session with the committee, the community learning and development workforce has been diminishing across the country in the past 10 years. Community councils are affected by that as well, and they should be supported, not just with those hardcore skills of finance and planning but with what are sometimes considered softer skills, in things such as community engagement, facilitation, mediation skills and community organising, which are just as important. That could make a massive difference.

Given the very centralised system of governance that we have, many policies need to be developed at a granular level across Scotland. If all of a sudden we had that increased capacity, the 1,200 community councils would reach far and deep into communities and would mobilise all kinds of capacity and energy to make things happen.

**Emma Swift:** That is one of the areas that the Improvement Service tries to work on. We have limited resources, so we tend to partner with organisations that already have materials that we can repurpose and share with community councils. For example, we worked with the Open University, which has created a portal for community councillors that provides free training in things such as community engagement skills, finance and digital. We work with the Scottish Tech Army, which has created websites for some community councils and provided training on things such as using devices to take video.

We created our own social media guide. Community engagement will not get anywhere without good communication skills, and social media is the format to do that, but not everybody who works with a community council is confident in using social media. We have also run a series of webinars. We brought in organisations such as Sustrans that can provide information and support directly to community councils. It is about

repurposing what is already out there with the limited resources that we have.

One of the biggest things that we have done is with a company called Geosphere. Again, that has been done through relationships that the Improvement Service has as a result of our Spatial Hub website, which categorises local data. With Geosphere, we have produced Community Map Scotland, which is a mapping tool—Jackie Weaver might be familiar with the English version, which is called Parish Online. Community councils have access to that free mapping tool, through which they can see their community area and all the relevant data. That is very useful in creating local place plans, and some community councils have already used it to map things such as new path networks. They have free access to the software for a year.

As I said, it is all about developing relationships with organisations that already provide services to see whether they can be repurposed for community councils because, as well as the fact that community councils have limited resources, there are limited resources to support them.

**Jackie Weaver:** Our national body, the National Association of Local Councils, provides us with all the policy document support that we need, tailored to the sector. I specifically want to speak about planning. We provide planning training, which is incredibly popular—it sells out every year, because parish councils are interested in planning.

However, it is important to remember that we are not the planning authority. We do not need to create an army of new planners. That is not the role of parish councils, and in many ways we can try to overprofessionalise them. We want them to understand the system so that they can contribute well but, ultimately, their strength is in being able to convey the local opinion. The local opinion might have nothing to do with a planning point; it might be a passion over something that is not a planning consideration.

Interestingly, some work was done about 10 years ago—this is not exactly current, but we have not done it again since—when Telford and Wrekin Council devolved decision making to a parish council, as a trial for 12 months. That was an unmitigated disaster. Planning support was provided, just like a planning committee would have, and the parish council operated like a planning committee. However, we have never repeated it since—that is not what we are looking for.

In Cheshire—I think that this is replicated throughout the country—I find that the focus has moved from commentary on planning applications to taking a lead and looking at the development of neighbourhood plans. That has really taken off.

Initially, there were half a dozen of them, but now even the smallest parish councils are producing their own development plans, which give the community's view about how they see development in their community. We are moving away from the reactive approach of saying, "I don't like that planning application," to saying, "If we're going to have development in this community, this is what we want." Again, support is key but, at the same time, we are not trying to make a new army of planning officers.

**Willie Coffey:** I cannot wait to read more about the disasters that befell Telford and Wrekin Council.

Thank you very much for your contributions, everybody.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** We have touched on the issue of how community councils convey the views of the community to authorities, whether that is national Government, local government, health boards or other statutory authorities. How do they do community engagement that allows them to genuinely convey the community's view, rather than the individual views of the members of the community council? Is that happening, and how is it happening?

**Dr Escobar:** That situation definitely happens. It goes back to the vicious circle that I mentioned earlier. When you have a space that does not have enough power to make things happen and does not attract enough diversity of people to come into it, there will always be a situation in which some really strong people come into that space, and they might think that their view is the view of their community—I have seen that happen. I think that a lot of community councillors will realise that it happens in many community councils.

That is problematic, because it is precisely what sometimes prevents local authorities, community planning partnerships, third sector interfaces and other bodies from giving community councils a hearing and space, and from building the collaboration that they should be building.

That happens, but I do not think that it is an excuse to not take community councils seriously, because that is perpetuating the cycle. If they are not taken seriously, not enough people come into that space, and then you do not have enough people who have that sense of representing the diversity of the community.

In the best community councils that I know, the community councillors see themselves as facilitators and as being there to try to understand what their community needs and aspires to, and then to convey that. Those community councillors are more like delegates than representatives.

That is the original sin in the way that community councils were set up—they almost imitate elected local councils, but without any of the powers. What I mean by that is that the notion that you are a representative—you are elected and therefore are representative and your judgment should be trusted—does not really work with community councillors. They should be more like delegates who constantly keep a link to their community, have channels to their community, have community engagement forums and digital crowdsourcing platforms, and have access to all kinds of ways of facilitating dialogue and deliberation in their communities.

That is not the case at the moment. Even in the best community councils, if they do not have capacity to engage their community, when they make representations in committees, partnerships and so on, they will put forward what they believe is the view of their community and, sometimes, they might not be able to back that up, because they have not had the resource to do proper community engagement.

Community councils are between a rock and a hard place. They take up representation opportunities. Those who have capacity to do community engagement base that representation on proper community engagement, but those who do not have capacity still need to make representations, and those representations are probably unreflective of their community. That connects to all the issues of capacity and support that we have spoken about.

10:15

To me, that is the core message. We have had community councils for 50 years and, although we need to celebrate the achievement—I look forward to hearing the panel with community councillors, because I am sure that they can share many of the successes—I think that the time has come to either reform or rebuild. We could reform community councils so that we have one of the most decentralised systems of governance, as we should do if we want to tackle issues locally and nationally. Alternatively, we could rebuild them. We could just start again if people do not want to reform them as they are.

That is problematic—I have been making that case to ministers and MSPs for a long time, but no one seems to want to spend the political capital on such reform. However, that reform is not just about community councils. If you think carefully and place community councils on a map and see the connections that they have to community planning partnerships, local government, health and social care integration boards, third sector interfaces and the planning process, you realise that, if you had highly functioning, dynamic, participative and

inclusive community councils, you could unlock a lot of potential in those systems of local government that do not work well at the moment. It is not a silver bullet, but it is not far from it, if we bite the bullet and do that reform.

**Mark Griffin:** Does anybody else want to comment on community engagement?

**Emma Swift:** It is quite intimidating to come in on the back of those big ideas.

You will probably hear from the next panel that there are fantastic examples of community councils that engage with the community, whether it is through surveys or events—that is how they get feedback. Inevitably, you will have people with strong opinions coming on to community councils as well.

I have touched on the local place plans idea, through which community councils can develop their own plan for what they want in their community. However, we have heard from community councils that their concern is that the local authority will not listen. The local authority has a responsibility to take it on board. If the process has been followed correctly, the community engagement has been done and a good local place plan has been produced by the community council or other community organisation, the local authority has a responsibility to take that seriously and take forward those ideas.

**Brian Davey:** Part of the issue of community engagement for community councils is that they need to get access to digital tools and software. You might hear from Donald Stavert from West Lothian later. His community council has tried to engage with its community using the community engagement aspect of the Consul Democracy participatory budgeting digital tool. I think that there is an issue with how community councils access software, either from their local authorities or in using things such as Mailchimp, for which they might not have licences and so on. That is an issue.

**Mark Griffin:** I put the same question to Jackie Weaver. Do you have examples of how well or how badly community or parish councils are engaging with the wider community? What best practice models have you seen in making sure that the wider community's views have been expressed?

**Jackie Weaver:** My initial comment would be that there is a dual standard here. When we talk about our town and parish councils' engagement versus our principal authority engagement, we expect a lot more from our parishes than we perhaps get from our principal authorities in the first place. Please bear that in mind.

There are lots of examples. The most current one would probably be that we are moving away from the approach of our principal authorities giving out grants and saying, "Here's a pot of money—bid for it," to a crowdfunding model. That is helpful, in that it widens the pool of people who are giving money but, perhaps more importantly, it is a really good way of demonstrating community support for an idea. When a town or parish council wants to do an expensive project, if 1,000 people all give money, albeit that it is only £1 or £2 each, you can see that there is great community support for the idea.

I mentioned the ability for councils to borrow money. When a council wants to borrow money, it has to give physical evidence of community engagement on that. It has to demonstrate that the community is supportive of its entering into a contract to borrow money. I would like to say that all councils are perfect in their communications with their community but, of course, they are not—some are appalling. However, more and more, they are using digital communication tools, as previous speakers said, and moving on from participatory budgeting to things such as crowdfunding as a mechanism for raising money and for gauging how much community support there is for a project. There are lots of good examples out there.

**Mark Griffin:** Thank you for that. As well as asking about how community councils represent the views of the wider community, I would like to ask about how we make sure that community councils and community councillors are representative of their communities and how we increase the number of volunteers. I do not know how many community council elections have been contested over the past 10 or 20 years. How do we increase the level of participation? How do we make sure that people with caring responsibilities and people from marginalised communities are involved? How do we make sure that community councillors are as representative as possible? I will come to Emma Swift first.

**Emma Swift:** We do that in many of the same ways as councils and the Scottish Parliament try to be more diverse, such as by engaging with the right organisations. We already engage with youth organisations, Elect Her and Inclusion Scotland in an effort to get them involved in speaking to community councils so that they give that some thought. As you said, the difficulty is that, often, there are uncontested elections, so the people who come forward are the people who are the community council. It is a case of planting the seed in the heads of the people in the community that they might want to step forward and do it.

The fact that you can have to give up a lot of your time to be a community councillor is an issue

for people with caring responsibilities. That comes back to a lack of support. If you are expected to give up the time not just for meetings but for writing up minutes or dealing with admin or correspondence, that will take up a lot of your time. Having a support network might change that in a positive way.

There is a mechanism with community councils whereby people—even people from outside the area—can be co-opted on to them. That has happened with young people—there are quite a few examples of community councils that have co-opted 16 and 17-year-olds on to them. They are not full community councillors, but they attend the meetings and they see what goes on. Quite a lot of them also engage with pupil councils from the local high school. By getting them involved, they start young people on the path of getting interested in community democracy and what is happening in their local area. There are lots of ways in which we can improve community councils in that respect, in the same way that every level of democracy wants to improve diversity and representation.

**Brian Davey:** To add to what Emma Swift said, as part of the work that we have done on the community councils project over the past two or three years, we have heard it suggested that there should be a national day for community council elections, to shine a light on them and give them a bit more prominence. That is another idea.

**Dr Escobar:** This is a critical issue, because community councils should look like the communities that they represent. They should reflect the variety of views of the communities that they are there to serve, but the way in which they are set up produces a self-selection bias.

That is not to take anything away from serving community councillors. We should appreciate the time that they give, but they themselves have told us in two research projects—the report on one of those has been mentioned; the other was done as part of the work of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities commission on strengthening local democracy—that they want their community councils to be more diverse. Community councillors themselves have said that repeatedly. When we asked them whether community councils needed to become more representative of the wider community, only 22 per cent disagreed with that. More than 50 per cent agreed, with differing levels of strength.

Community councillors recognise the issue, but how can you attract people to a space that will inspire action and make things happen when there is no certainty? A lot of the community councillors are there because they persevere and they can put in the time. It takes a lot of effort, skill and time to be part of a community council. The reality is

that only some people can afford that, and that generates a particular self-selection bias.

There are a number of barriers to participation. We mapped that as part of the What Works Scotland study, “‘Hard to reach’ or ‘easy to ignore’?”, which is about community engagement and the barriers to it. Some of those things have already been mentioned. If people such as single parents, those on low incomes, full-time carers or people with a disability are being asked to take up a voluntary role when no effort has been made to remove the barriers for them to participate, we cannot be surprised that community councils are not more reflective of their communities.

I think that an inclusion fund should be available to community councils to remove barriers to participation so that people can say, “I need support with transport,” “I need support with childcare,” “I need support with care,” or whatever it might be. If we are serious about community councils being representative of the diversity of their communities, we need to remove the barriers to participation. If we do that, I think that we will be in a fairer situation. To dismiss community councils because they are not diverse when we do not give them the support to become diverse is unfair. That is the critique that is sometimes made.

Some community councils have achieved diversity of representation through co-option and proactive measures with young people or existing groups, but that is not the case across the board. The issue has a lot to do with the infrastructure of support. I would love to see local authorities, for example, advocating for support for community councils to the Scottish Government. Successful training programmes have been run through the Improvement Service and other organisations, so we know that it could be done.

The question is how we give community councils the value, the visibility and the support, knowing that that will be a good return on investment. At the end of the day, that is a key factor, which we have not mentioned. If we invest in this, it will improve people’s lives and it will improve the condition of many communities across the country. That must be the bottom line. We are talking about not just better democracy and better representation, but better capacity to make a difference to people’s lives.

**Andrew Paterson:** I was going to make a similar point. I would add to Dr Escobar’s point by saying that if you had representation and more diverse community councils, that still might not be enough. What I mean by that is that if members of community councils do not have the time to participate fully, they will not fulfil their role in the way that they would want to and to their potential. That support needs to be there. Fundamentally, we need to support people to have the time and

resources to take part in such processes fully, especially when they face barriers.

**The Convener:** That is a good point.

**Mark Griffin:** Jackie Weaver, do you have any reflections to offer on the diversity of parish councils in England?

**Jackie Weaver:** I think that we have to look a little wider than the council itself. Others have spoken eloquently about the barriers that exist, and I totally concur with everything that has been said. I think that one of the challenges in attracting people to sit as councillors is that you are asking them to be interested in everything. Very often, people are more about a single issue—they might feel passionately about the environment, planning or finance—than they are good all-rounders.

I ask the committee to look a bit further than the actual seats on the council, because many of our councils have working groups and committees, which are a good way of encouraging diversity. I am talking about inviting people to come along and bring their passion, rather than requiring them to be passionate about being a councillor, if that makes sense. You could have a “Friends of” group or you might have a community development committee whose function is to look after the assets—things such as playing fields or village halls—which people are really behind, although they are not particularly interested in the wider work of the council. If we look a bit further underneath the surface, we will probably find more diversity than we might see if we look only at election results.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** Good morning. Why is there no umbrella organisation representing the interests of community councils nationally in Scotland? Has the winding up of the Association of Scottish Community Councils had a negative impact?

10:30

**Emma Swift:** I will have a go at that. Unfortunately, the winding up of the national association was before my time. Why there is not such an organisation is a very good question to ask. The Improvement Service was brought on board to provide some of the services that the national association provided—the training, the communications, the networking and so on—but the lobbying aspect, which involved lobbying for the interests of community councils, is the part of the function that is missing.

Across the country, there are regional forums. Several of those will be represented on the next panel. They can provide regional support. However, there is no national organisation. In recent years, there has been no drive for one, as

far as I have seen. Brian Davey might be able to say more, as he has been on the project slightly longer than I have.

**Brian Davey:** Yes—slightly longer. The Scottish community councils project is the only national support for community councils. From what we hear, it seems to have been well received and to be going well. I could not comment on the demise of the national association 10 years or so ago.

**Dr Escobar:** I will comment on that. To be honest, I have been waiting for the opportunity to do so for 11 years. I and others in the room were there in 2012 for the last ever conference of the Association of Scottish Community Councils. It was a difficult moment. On one hand, I was there to give a keynote speech about a more participatory democracy, the community empowerment agenda and what was coming down the line with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill. On the other hand, we were about to disband the only body that represented community councillors across the country.

The reason for that—this is on paper and on the public record—is that the Scottish Government cut the funding in half and the association could not make it work. That is my understanding. There were other reasons. There were internal issues, but I do not have first-hand knowledge of those; I am just going by the public record.

However, the point here is that it is absolutely crucial to have such a body, for a number of reasons. You will hear this in your discussion with the panel of community councillors. Joint forums and federations of community councils are doing important work. When you have such a dispersed group of people across the country who are trying to do so many different things and who face so many different challenges, the opportunity to communicate and network is important.

There is also the question of economies of scale. For example, it makes very little sense to roll out a new piece of software to facilitate community engagement, or to crowd fund or crowd source, community council by community council. You need to do such things in aggregate. At the moment, some joint forums and federations do that, but a national association could create economies of scale that would make things even more affordable. It could roll out skills training, expertise and train-the-trainer opportunities. Although the Improvement Service does some of those things, the advocacy function is not there, which means that community councils do not have a national voice in conversations such as this one or on things such as the community wealth building agenda and the local governance review.

On a more practical level, there is also a question about the division of labour. What I mean

by that is that, in a local authority area, community councillors are invited to all kinds of committees, boards, partnership meetings and so on. As was said earlier, different people are interested in different things. If you only invite people from the local community council, rather than getting the variety or the capacity that you would get across a joint forum or a federation, it is much harder to get people to sit in all those places. Therefore, there is a division of labour argument for having a national association that provides an umbrella for federations of local associations. We need to get the national association back and to get it right this time.

**Marie McNair:** Thank you. Would our online witnesses like to come in?

**Jackie Weaver:** Thank you. We have the National Association of Local Councils—NALC. Interestingly, its equivalent for our principal authorities is the Local Government Association. The LGA receives central Government funding to the tune of about £7 million a year. The National Association of Local Councils costs the Government nothing—it is entirely self-funded through membership subscription from our member councils.

Our system is that we have 40 county associations. County associations collect a levy from the parish councils for the county association and the national body, which they pass on to the national body. The national body then supports us as county associations by giving legal advice, lobbying central Government and so on. Our role is to support procedural training and so on for our local councils, and our engagement is with our principal authorities. The national association, in turn, supports us and is the voice of the sector when it comes to central Government. To my mind, both are essential. I make the point that they are also cheap, because they do not cost the Government anything at all.

**Andrew Paterson:** On Jackie Weaver's point, the powers that the local parish councils have locally seem to be the mechanism by which the national association is funded, if it comes up through the levy. If we are joining the pieces together, in some way or another community councils need to have more powers and more resources if they are to have a national profile and more influence.

**The Convener:** We move on to questions from Miles Briggs.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Good morning, panel. Thank you for joining us. I will return to how community councils engage in the participatory budgeting process, which we have touched on. What impact has the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 had? What positives has it

brought? Emma Swift touched on asset transfers. What are your views on that and on potential reforms that could empower community councils?

**Emma Swift:** Some aspects of the 2015 act apply to community councils, but some do not, because community councils are unincorporated. That is a little confusing and the waters are a little muddy, especially for community councillors who might not understand the differences in the legislation or might not have had that explained.

We are working on an updated guidance document for community councillors, which we hope to publish in the autumn. That will have more information about the aspects of the 2015 act that apply to them and how those aspects apply. That has been a positive change in the past 50 years.

Participatory budgeting is used in different ways with community councils. Some community councils bid for participatory budgeting from other sources, and others use participatory budgeting—the term is difficult to say; I will say “PB” from now on—to distribute funds that they have collected from different sources. That involves very local community voting on which project people want to be funded, which goes back to the community engagement point—you are getting local people to vote on which project in their area should be funded.

There have been positive aspects to both approaches. I am sure that the committee will hear from the next panel of witnesses about ways in which they have used PB, especially in Moray. It is interesting that community councils have used it from both sides—in bidding for and distributing funding.

**Dr Escobar:** Community councillors sometimes find themselves developing proposals for PB and sometimes find themselves as organisers. Many of them want to become organisers of PB but, now that we no longer have the national community choices fund, the approach is down to local authority areas. Across the country, progress is uneven towards meeting the commitment that the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed whereby at least 1 per cent of funding is to be allocated through PB. If the development of that were more even, community councils could play a stronger role.

The committee will hear about PB from the later panel. PB has enabled some community councils to find their purpose, because it helps them to connect with their communities and make things happen—people can see the effects of investing directly in the local area.

Sadly, the 2015 act did not do enough for community councils—it did very little. The only thing that it did was to say that community councils are one of the bodies that are recognised for

participatory requests, despite many people—including me and many others—arguing and advising for three years in the run-up to the bill's introduction that we needed to reform community councils, because they have been in place a long time and need support and help. In the end, all of that was dropped—it was a no-go area. That was frustrating; I do not know why we cannot reform community councils. We have community councillors' support and we know that there would be support across the country, because people see what community councils can accomplish.

Reform could really improve the position on assets. The community wealth building agenda is the right place to discuss that, but I do not see community councils being given enough space in that agenda.

We need to understand better why so many community councils feel that they cannot do what they want to do unless they set themselves up as a community development trust, which is not possible for all of them. Why is so much energy and talent going into projects that cannot be taken forward because community councils do not have the powers that they need? The community wealth building agenda provides a great opportunity to do the things that the 2015 act did not do.

Such things need to go in tandem. The counterargument is often made that, if community councils are not diverse enough and not representative enough and do not have enough capacity, how can we give them more powers? Such things need to go hand in hand. Reform needs more support so that community councils can take up new opportunities.

The approach works when community councils set up community anchor organisations and community development trusts and when they begin to become economic engines for their communities—bodies that serve communities not just by doing important stuff such as galas and smaller projects, but by supporting economic regeneration. That is the potential that we are talking about if we set up community councils for that purpose.

**Miles Briggs:** Does anyone who is online want to respond?

**Andrew Paterson:** To continue on that theme, part 3 of the 2015 act, which is on participation requests, is perhaps underutilised. That is partly because of a lack of understanding about its potential to support collaborative work to improve things. It is interesting to observe that community councils have been the main organisations that have made participation requests—more than half have come from community councils.

The potential is there and community councils are engaging with the agenda. As well as

considering the community wealth building legislation and what comes with that, it will be important that the local governance review reinforces community councils' role.

**Miles Briggs:** That leads me on nicely to the question of what else you want to see as part of the on-going local governance review to change legislation and strengthen the position of community councils. Does the whole local democracy system need to be reformed in relation to the role of community councils and to empower them, as Oliver Escobar suggested? Do we need to capture anything else that we have not heard in today's evidence?

10:45

**Dr Escobar:** I will kick off with a couple of things. There are a lot of ideas out there. Every time we talk to community councillors—as we did in 2014 for the COSLA commission on strengthening local democracy and as we did for research in 2019—community councillors show that they are ready for reform and have a lot of ideas. They do not necessarily agree on the best ways forward, but there is consensus that reforms are needed.

I said earlier that we either reform or rebuild. Rebuilding is a much more comprehensive and challenging task; I am not saying that it is not the way to go—that is fine if there is the appetite for radical reform and rethinking, and we can all learn from the experience of community councils. However, if we want more incremental reform, we know how community councils could be changed, adjusted and supported to do what they are supposed to be doing and more.

We now have a context in the local governance space, given the wealth of community development trusts, community anchor organisations, participatory budgeting processes and all kinds of democratic innovations that are flourishing at that level. We now know that community councils could play an important role if they had the support to do that.

In many ways, community councils are the key to unlocking or addressing some shortcomings of community planning, health and social care integration partnerships and many other local bodies. Every time we look at local governance in a holistic way as an ecology of practices and institutions, we see that, if we were to reform community councils and make them fit for purpose, a lot of other things could start to fall into place.

My main concluding point is to say that surely the time has come—we have got to do this. Some people might ask whether we should spend time on such reform and whether people care about it.

People care about having better places to live in, having better local services, improving their life condition and addressing things such as the cost of living crisis. All those things require a vibrant combination of local institutions that can make things happen. Community councils have to be part of that, and they have been part of that in many places. We need to learn and to go for the reform. The problem is not about knowing what to do but about knowing how to do it. We need the political leadership and the political know-how to advance the reform.

**Emma Swift:** The only thing that I will add is that, in the same way as we have talked about how important it is for community councils to engage with their communities on what the communities want, it is vital for community councils to be involved in and consulted on the local governance review. It is a few years since the previous research was done. Community councils must be involved in the process and, in turn, they must involve their communities. Community councils often provide the best way to reach communities. That is a great tool for talking about the local governance review, which you have to make sure that you use.

**Brian Davey:** Last time around, we had the “Democracy matters” conversations—it is a wee while since those conversations took place. A good example comes from the Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian, which had an event at West Lothian civic centre and has produced a blueprint for the future of community councils, which it will hold an online national conference on next month. That shows the involvement that community councils can have in democracy matters and the local governance review.

**Andrew Paterson:** An important aspect that has been missing from empowerment legislation such as the 2015 act is the support that is needed to reinforce legislation, such as resources to provide local support for community organisations—including community councils, especially in disadvantaged areas. Capacity building needs to be available. As Oliver Escobar pointed out, as the community learning and development workforce has been depleted in many areas, there is inconsistency that needs to be addressed in legislation.

**Jackie Weaver:** For me, one thing that underpins everything that we are looking at is independence, which is incredibly difficult to drive from a principal authority perspective. It is hugely important that parish councils are independent.

We had one large council that was created on the borders of Cheshire, and the principal authority paid lip service to it. It set up the council because there was local demand, but the council was

operated by principal authority officers, and it failed three years later. It was basically an outreach of the principal authority. Such bodies need to be treated as grown-up partners rather than as a community extension of the principal authority. That is hugely important.

Another aspect to consider is resourcing. The model that we have in England is far from perfect, but if you were to ask me how I would change it I would not have a clue. It works reasonably well to have a centralised independent support body—I stress the independence—for town and parish councils. The cost to the principal authority is very little. My organisation’s income comes largely from our members, which are the town and parish councils, and there is national support. Throughout all of that is the confidence to make bodies independent.

My final comment is that I feel that the driver for the growth of the town and parish council sector in England was a lack of money. I would like to say that it was because our principal authorities were all passionate about their town and parish councils but, ultimately, support for town and parish councils was simply pragmatic. Having less and less money as each year went by, local authorities recognised that, if they wanted to keep their electors happy and wanted to see things delivered locally, the town and parish council model was an effective and cheap way of delivering.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. We have run out of time, but I have a question for Oliver Escobar, which we do not necessarily have time for him to answer now. I am interested to know whether you have set out in writing the difference between taking the radical route of rebuilding versus the more incremental route of reforming. Do you have that comparison in a simple form that you could send us? That would be interesting, because we have the opportunity of the local democracy bill and community wealth building. That information might help us to understand those two approaches.

At the new deal for local government event that we held a few weeks ago, one voice said that we need to take the incremental approach and another voice said that something needed to be broken. You are almost saying that as well.

**Dr Escobar:** I do not have that exact document, but elements of it are in the report that we wrote for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities’ commission in 2014, which I can share. That deals with more radical and more moderate approaches to reforming community councils.

The evidence that has been gathered through the local governance review and through the democracy matters conversation covers the spectrum. Some of the evidence assumes that we

will keep community councils and just improve and reform them. Other parts of the body of evidence say that we should start from scratch.

I was part of the research group for the local governance review process. A study was done of models in seven or eight other countries, which is available, to look at other forms of local tiers of democracies.

That is a bit scattered, but we can pull something together.

**The Convener:** I am sure that we can also have help from Greig Liddell in the Scottish Parliament information centre. I have a host of other questions, but we do not have time to go into them now. Maybe I can pick them up in the round table that we will move on to next.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us. The session was useful. It was fantastic to have Jackie Weaver's perspective from England, which was useful for us to hear.

I suspend the meeting to allow us to set up for our round table.

10:53

*Meeting suspended.*

11:04

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Welcome back. We will have a round-table discussion about community councils with our second panel. I extend many thanks to our panel for joining us. We are joined in the room by John Bachtler, chair of Cambuslang community council; Debra Duke, community council liaison officer at Moray Council; Alastair Kennedy, chair of the joint community councils of Moray; Steve Kerr, chair of the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils; Donald Stavert, treasurer of the joint forum of community councils in West Lothian; and Barry Cathie, from the royal burgh of Rutherglen community council.

We are joined online by Shayne McLeod, vice-chair of the association of Shetland community councils; Bill Pitt, chair of New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan community council; and Ewart McAuslane, treasurer of Tillicoultry, Coalsnaughton and Devonside community council. I welcome you all.

For those of you who are online, you can let the clerks know that you would like to reply to a question by typing R in the chat function. For those in the room, you do not need to operate your microphone; that will be done for you by our broadcasting team.

I will begin our conversation by inviting you all to briefly introduce yourselves. I will start. I am Ariane Burgess, MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

**John Bachtler (Cambuslang Community Council):** Good morning. Thank you for the invitation. As was said, I am chair of Cambuslang community council in South Lanarkshire. We focus particularly on economic regeneration and environmental issues. We have done quite a lot of survey work, not just within our community but with other local community councils, to address issues such as relationships with local authorities. We can perhaps come on to discuss those issues.

**Willie Coffey:** Hello, everyone. I am MSP for Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley.

**Barry Cathie (Royal Burgh of Rutherglen Community Council):** I am a member of Rutherglen community council in South Lanarkshire.

**Miles Briggs:** Good morning, everybody. I am an MSP for the Lothian region.

**Marie McNair:** Good morning. I represent the Clydebank and Milngavie constituency.

**Debra Duke (Moray Council):** I am a community council liaison officer at Moray Council, and I spent five years as a parish clerk in England, so I have experience of two systems.

**Shayne McLeod (Association of Shetland Community Councils):** Hello. I am vice-chair of the association of Shetland community councils. I am also vice-chair of Lerwick community council, which is one of the 18 community councils that serve Shetland.

**Bill Pitt (New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan Community Council):** Thank you for inviting me. I am the chairman of New Aberdour, Tyrie and Pennan community council.

**Ewart McAuslane (Tillicoultry, Coalsnaughton and Devonside Community Council):** Good morning. I am the treasurer of Tillicoultry, Coalsnaughton and Devonside community council, which is one of nine community councils in Clackmannanshire.

**Steve Kerr (Edinburgh Association of Community Councils):** I am the chair of the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils, and I chair my local community council in Corstorphine. Many years ago, I was part of the McIntosh commission, which looked at the reform of community councils.

**Alastair Kennedy (Joint Community Councils of Moray):** Good morning, everybody. I chair Elgin community council and the joint community councils of Moray, which is the overarching body.

**Mark Griffin:** I am an MSP for the Central Scotland region.

**Donald Stavert (Joint Forum of Community Councils in West Lothian):** I am treasurer of the joint forum of community councils in West Lothian. I am also treasurer of Bathgate community council, where I live.

**Ivan McKee:** I am MSP for Glasgow Provan.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much. The clerks will not introduce themselves, but they are here and are really important. We have heard so much about the importance of support and administration, and the committee would not function without those people helping to keep us on track and doing that work.

I will kick off with the same question that I asked the first panel. We are interested in your reflections on the strengths of community councils. We have heard examples of the role that community councils in some areas in Scotland were able to play during the Covid pandemic—earlier, Emma Swift said that that was a demonstration of resilience—and they are also doing work during the cost of living crisis. We are interested in what is happening in your local areas.

**John Bachtler:** Quite a few things that I will mention are critical, so I will start with some positives and focus particularly on the strengths.

**The Convener:** That is what we are going for with this question.

**John Bachtler:** In some senses, the lack of specificity about the strategy responsibilities of community councils can be an advantage, because it provides the flexibility to respond in quite varied ways to issues that the community is interested in. In Cambuslang, through a lot of community and business survey work about 10 years ago, we identified that the big issue was regeneration of the town at a time when there were big cutbacks. The town centre manager had gone. We were able to develop a joint regeneration strategy and bring in substantial amounts of funding—in the millions. We piloted the first banking hub in Scotland and established a charitable trust to create a cycle park. We were involved in the asset transfer of some green space. My colleagues will want me to mention a murals project that is up for a Scottish design award. During Covid, we also ran a food hub.

What was that down to? In essence, it was down to the capacity of a fairly small group of between six and eight people who were very committed and were prepared to put in a substantial amount of time. Crucially, as Oliver Escobar said, they had various networks both professionally and within the community. Some of them therefore knew how things worked—how

things worked within local authorities, how to write grant applications, how to lobby the Scottish Government and other bodies and how to build partnerships. Crucially, a lot of the work was built on community engagement, particularly through survey work, as I said.

Over the past few years, there has been a change in the local authority's engagement, which, historically, has been, let us say, variable. That has been really important. With new leadership, the creation of a community engagement unit in the local authority and the piloting of local people in Cambuslang and Rutherglen being involved in the community planning partnership process, we are starting to see quite significant change. It is still early days in some respects, but that shift in what has sometimes—perhaps even often—been an adversarial relationship with the local authority has been important.

It has also been invaluable to draw on some of the groups that we heard from this morning, such as the Improvement Service, the Scottish community councils initiative and the SCDC, for guidance and advice.

That is all positive. We will perhaps come to the downsides later.

**The Convener:** That is fantastic. Those are the things that we want to hear—tremendous.

**Steve Kerr:** What I will say goes back to the earlier conversation about diversity, involving members of the community and being representative. The City of Edinburgh Council has used the Scottish Government's matrix for place making on at least three occasions that I know of, including with my own community council in Corstorphine. The matrix is used to test services and elements of the environment that members of the community feel particularly attached to or feel are important or deficient. By working with the city council, we were able to use that matrix. The spin-off advantage was that we reached out to members of the community who were keen to be active—they just needed to be encouraged to know a bit more about the community council and what it does—to see whether they could give us some of their time. That was good for the council, too, because it was then able to focus on the things in my area that people saw as issues and on the things that were valued and needed to be protected.

That planning tool is tremendously helpful, including in relation to diversity and inclusion. My community council was able to use the co-opting facility to bring people on to the community council who came along to workshops and who expressed interest online in being involved. That meant that there was a change in the gender, ethnicity and age demographic of the community council. That

tool was invaluable to me, as chair of the community council, in ensuring that we looked representative of the community that we were representing.

11:15

**The Convener:** Thank you. The Scottish Government's matrix for place making is an example of a useful tool.

**Donald Stavert:** I can talk about what happened during Covid. In West Lothian, there was a mix of approaches, because quite a few organisations had already been set up to provide food to disadvantaged people. The local council put together a food network that covered most of West Lothian, and quite a few community councils were involved in providing and distributing food. A lot of local emergency committees and volunteers sprung up, and community councils fed them with information from the local authority and so on. There was a matrix of support, and community councils were involved in lots of different ways. Our forum principally dealt with spreading information through the myriad Facebook pages that we have in West Lothian so that that information got out to the community.

**The Convener:** That is tremendous.

Alastair Kennedy, do you want to mention any strengths from the Moray perspective?

**Alastair Kennedy:** I am very active in the community and am involved in lots of other things, and one of the strengths of joint community councils is that they draw people and organisations together. Over the years, we have found that they are great forums for exchanging information and for lobbying. I remember that, a few years ago, there was a particular problem with one road. All the community councils came together and lobbied to have it changed, and we got it changed, so there is strength in a collective.

**Debra Duke:** I want to talk about resilience groups. Following the work that community councils did during Covid, the Moray and Aberdeenshire area has been particularly badly hit by storms in the past few years. Community resilience groups have been important in communicating from the ground level up to those involved in emergency planning and the emergency response in the Moray and Grampian area.

That system has been set up through community councils. A community resilience group will be a sub-group of a community council but will have a wider membership. A lot of the members of a community resilience group are not community councillors; they are just interested in a particular area. That has been useful in increasing diversity

and getting people who have particular skills or knowledge but who do not necessarily want to be involved in the full community council business.

A lot of funding has been drawn down from the Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks resilient communities fund. That has been supported by Moray Council through the community support unit—I am part of that team—rather than through democratic services. Community councils are supported differently in every local authority area in Scotland, which is quite interesting.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much for that. Does anyone online want to come in on the perspective of strengths? Does no one have anything to add? No strengths? Gosh!

I am going to weave my next two questions together. We have started to touch on them a little bit. What are your views around the support that you receive from local authorities where you are? Are they good relationships? What are your views on the community council liaison officers and on national support? Is there enough training, grants from the Scottish Government and support from the Improvement Service? What are your thoughts about the Scottish community council website and the knowledge hub?

There are a couple of things there on working with the local authorities and also that national support. We have some people in the room who you will be commenting on but, as we know, all feedback is constructive and it all helps us to develop in a good way.

**Alastair Kennedy:** I need to be very careful here because my CLO is sitting across from me. Debra Duke works very hard but she is only part time and she struggles to do the work that she needs to do, so there is a problem. I do not know if it is replicated across the whole of Scotland but there is certainly a problem with support for community councils in Moray.

We spoke about the relationship with the local authority. I have been at this for about 20 years and the relationship with the local authority in our area has changed radically over those 20 years—it has improved greatly. There are still areas where it could be improved, but overall it has become much more positive. That is probably a positive on both sides.

**The Convener:** Is there anything specific that you have seen that has brought about the positive change in the relationship?

**Alastair Kennedy:** A few iterations ago of the local development plan, we were given something like three weeks to comment on the document, which is a significant size. We said, "No, you need to stop and think again". To be fair to the team, it

stopped and heeded what was needed. It is now held up as exemplar of engagement in the Moray Council area. So, community councils might have role in that respect, by saying, “Hold on, you need to listen to us” and being quite forceful about it.

**The Convener:** I live in Moray and I have had that experience of very early engagement on the next local development plan. It has been tremendous.

**Bill Pitt:** Our relationship with Aberdeenshire Council and our particular area of Troup in Banff and Buchan is very important. As a community council, we do not work in a vacuum; we work very closely with Aberdeenshire Council and it is a two-way street. We need the council as much as possible and we appreciate and respect its assistance, including from individual departments and so forth. Aberdeenshire Council and other local authorities need community councils. We are the eyes and the ears for the local authority. It is very important for community councils to work with the local authority to identify particular funds that might be available and solutions that we can work together on. Working closely with the local authority is the most important thing that we can do, because it has the expertise to point us in certain directions in areas that we might need some guidance on.

In our community council—and I am sure this is true for other community councils—another thing that we see evolving is our responsibilities, which seem to be getting larger, particularly in regards to assets and asset transfers. The local authorities are under budget restraints, but they hold lots of properties, which are slowly but surely being liquidated. Those properties do not go away, so what happens to them? Those properties are within our communities, and our communities do not want to see redundant properties from local authorities laid to waste.

We are seeing a growth in asset transfers, which is a challenge for community councils because now we have an opportunity to receive the asset, which is fine, but what do we do with it and how do we continue to utilise it in a way that is important and beneficial to the community? That is a big responsibility. It is a challenge and also a strength.

In respect of those transfers, again, we have to cherish the relationship that we build with the council, because we both want to see those assets used in a positive way. However, as a community council, how do we fund and make those assets positive again? Those are the two things that I wanted to present.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much. I am going to go to Shayne McLeod online and then come to John Bachtler in the room.

**Shayne McLeod:** As I said, I am a member of one of 18 local community councils up here in Shetland. Each of us has great representation with our main council area. As a community council we always get core funding each year, which is given for our disposal. We work with different community groups around our different areas to fund the different projects that we have. We are given responsibilities here in Shetland; in local areas, like the Lerwick community council that I sit on, we have the ability to look at planning applications and various licensing applications, too. The main council gives us the responsibility to go ahead and look after our own little areas and it can trust us to do that. Trust is a big part of the community council and in our work with the main council as well—it is something that is very much needed.

**John Bachtler:** I mentioned earlier that we had done a survey of the 34 community councils in the South Lanarkshire area. I am not speaking on their behalf, but I will draw out some of the key points from that work. There were three key issues in terms of the relationship with the local authority in particular. One issue was culture and mindset. To take a negative example, in the past, a typical approach to something such as the draft local development plan was to put it online for consultation and ask for responses. That is incredibly challenging, given the complexity of something like a local development plan. I know that in other areas, local authorities have gone out systematically and met with community councils and other groups.

A more positive example is a response to the issue that was raised this morning about the complexity of planning. It may partly be a result of the conclusions of our survey report. The local authority took the initiative to pilot some new guidance with our community council, by asking, “How do you as a community council respond to planning applications, what are the questions you ask, what are the issues that you struggle with and what toolkit would be helpful?” From that initiative, a new toolkit was developed to support community councils, which was then revised in response to feedback. That was a positive way of addressing the issue that has been raised this morning.

A second issue that is mentioned frequently is capacity. We find that we lack some quite simple things, such as an annual training day or training session for new community council members. I know that that exists in some areas and offers new members a chance to meet others. A second thing that we lack is a portal or a sort of one-stop shop for advice. Although that is available at national level, doing it regionally or at local authority level would be helpful. Another aspect that we lack is a forum to share experience and collaborate. It is interesting to hear from some colleagues today that that exists.

The final issue is, of course, resources, particularly for community engagement. We have come across something that is perhaps a gender paradox. It was interesting what Steve Kerr said. When we put out surveys and consultations, we find that the majority of people who respond are women—the ratio is sometimes two-thirds to one-third. When it comes to membership or interest in membership of the community council, it is the reverse. Although at the moment our community council is reasonably gender balanced, there is quite a high attrition rate—this is not unique to community councils—because of issues with caring responsibilities getting in the way and understandably, taking priority.

11:30

I absolutely agree with Oliver Escobar's points about looking at how funding could remove certain barriers. Somebody asked earlier about the administrative grant that community councils get. In our case it is £500. Portobello community council did some research a few years ago where it looked at the funding for community councils. It found that there was quite a significant rural-urban divide, and that the community councils in the Highlands and Islands and Dumfries and Galloway were better resourced on a per capita basis than the urban community councils in the central belt.

**Steve Kerr:** Picking up on John Bachtler's point, during the work of the McIntosh commission we went to every council area in Scotland and met with community councils en masse in each of the areas. The difference in local authorities' appreciation for community councils in rural areas compared to urban areas was quite telling. There was a marked difference in the way that the authorities engaged and the appreciation level for community councils in rural areas, so I would endorse what John Bachtler and others have said.

As an example, there was an Audit Scotland report that was done a little while ago that looked at the City of Edinburgh Council's community engagement and how effective that was. The report was highly critical. As a result of that, we started a dialogue with senior city council officers who were designated to work with us on a reform agenda. That reform agenda has been on-going. We have talked about pushing back the election date in order to allow for the possibility of extending the role and responsibility of community councils, so that we can have that change as a compelling element when we go out to the locale to recruit community councillors for the next community council elections. We will probably come on to talk about elections.

The report that Audit Scotland conducted was critical of the structures that had been put in place, which have now been strengthened, and the

council has been going through a change to accommodate that. However, that was not the only criticism: fundamentally, we have a limited cadre of powers in respect of being consulted on planning and licensing and, effectively that had not been happening properly across the city.

I am very much somebody who believes in reform and rebuilding. We will probably come on to those ideas later on as well. I definitely think that there are some fundamental changes that need to be made in order for community councils to flourish and to be the organisations that we want them to be.

**Ewart McAuslane:** As a community councillor, I think that we are reasonably successful with community consultation. We are very lucky that we have only 5,500 people in a relatively small area. There are place plans that are ahead of schedule, and we have a good record with modern technology through the use of SurveyMonkey and stuff like that. That is not my field of expertise, but we use modern tools and we can speak to the community fairly quickly.

However, there is an issue on which I will throw a wobbly and perhaps rain on the council's parade. It is all very well for the Scottish Government or any Government to come up with community empowerment legislation, community asset registers and participation requests, but our experience has been uniformly negative. Earlier, the underutilisation of participation requests was mentioned. We have put two in and both were handled lamentably and in a way that demonstrated a consistent or a categorical refusal to engage. That is our position on that at the moment.

The only other thing that I would like to mention is on the fitness for purpose of community councils. If we do not manage the change, it will happen anyway and it will not necessarily stop there. That has been happening here. As I mentioned, we have nine community councils, six of which now have in place development trusts, because the council has been moving away from the operation of community centres, largely. The next move—I have seen this happening quite recently—involves moving community councils' traditional activities such as running galas and community events into the control of development trusts.

Over time—this remains to be seen because, as I said, that is all recent activity—we will have a situation in which a lot of that stuff will move to development trusts, leaving the traditional community councils with only the statutory stuff. Again, time will tell whether that will be enough to encourage people or allow the community to populate the two elements.

In the early stages of the development control materialisation, I was reassured that it would not make any difference. However, when the community council elections took place, two of the community councils could not get enough members. I do not know whether that is to do with populating two different agencies. Are they populated by the same people? It may be that some form of hybrid of community arrangement is called for that keeps the legitimacy of the election process and allows the community activity to carry on.

**The Convener:** Thanks very much. On the questions on working with local authorities and/or reflections on the support that you get at a national level, Donald Stavert wants to come in.

**Donald Stavert:** We exist as a forum because West Lothian Council encouraged us, as community councillors, to discuss that possibility in response to a request from one community council. It made it as easy as possible by giving us the facilities to come together.

Once we had come together and decided that we wanted a joint forum of community councils, it set about recognising us and passed the report through the council. We were invited to send representatives to all its scrutiny and policy development committees, and to the local community planning partnership. We still do that to this day. We were also invited into the review of the community council scheme. We were part and parcel of the working party that reviewed it recently—that was only about 18 months ago, before the elections took place last year.

We have a very good relationship with the council, and the chief executive sets out two formal meetings a year with the joint forum to talk through issues that are relevant to both parties.

Despite having good relationships with the council and the councillors, we still offer constructive criticism. For instance, we are never terribly pleased with the consultation processes for issues in West Lothian. We always argue that they should be much more local rather than West Lothian wide. For example, we had a West Lothian consultation on a 20mph speed limit, despite towns such as Bathgate not being happy with such a regime and villages such as Kirkliston that were desperate it. We make sure that our voice is heard on that issue.

The council has encouraged us to think about the future. I hope that we can come on to what the future might look like because we in West Lothian have some ideas about that.

One of the things that is a big influence recently has been access to town centre funds. Many community councils in West Lothian spotted that and said, “Oh—open windae. Let’s get in there

and take what we can”. Most community councils have had three rounds of town centre funds now and a lot of us have done stuff with them that has been useful and well received locally.

That transformed us, because we are organisations that exist on a few hundred pounds. The forum exists on £1,000 a year. The smallest community councils in West Lothian get £250. Bathgate, where I come from, is the biggest community council. Our entire budget is £1,700. We spend £1,400 of that on a secretary. That is one of the reasons why we kept active and have become very active—the administration is done for us by a person who takes very little for that work.

That is where we are in terms of support. We exist as a forum because the council wanted to bring that forward. It thought that it would be a good thing to have a joint representative body and we responded accordingly.

I highlight that we have also formed West Lothian-wide forums for specific subjects, such as transport, environment, police and planning. You will find people on community councils who are very interested in, say, transport while nobody else on it is too bothered about that. However, they can find kindred spirits in the West Lothian-wide forums and together they can raise big, important issues on those subjects.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much for that. Your having those specialist groups sounds like a really constructive approach. I am heartened to hear that West Lothian Council encouraged the formation of the forum and that it resourced it to some extent. It is also interesting to hear about the town centre funds. I notice that there are often pockets of money around, but it requires somebody to notice that those can be accessed.

**Donald Stavert:** Convener, I forgot to mention the Improvement Service, which has been very helpful to us, as our unofficial adviser for about the past year and a half. We have had such a good relationship that we put in a bid for an information technology system called Consul, which you may have heard of—quite a few councils are using it.

We wanted to use the system to get ideas from the communities that we represent and for them to determine, through a voting forum, whether those were supported. For example, we might ask whether we need a new football pitch and the response might be that we should have one in a certain place. We can then ask what everyone thinks about that and whether everybody who is taking part supports that.

We put in a bid to the investing in communities fund for the system. We were helped by West Lothian Council, which gave us a lot of technical advice. I think that that was because it wanted us to have access to Consul but not to its bit of

Consul in case it got messed up. Unfortunately, the bid was not successful. However, that is an example of the help and support that we have had from the Improvement Services.

**The Convener:** That is very good to hear.

Barry Cathie, do you want to come in?

**Barry Cathie:** It is important to have a bond with the council because it gives that trust to people who come to the meetings, as local residents have a voice in their community and can say what they think about things.

The council meetings that I attend are always helpful. The officials give advice to us on the community council. On moving things forward, if there are issues that we can deal with with the council at our meetings, that is great.

Many people might think that community councils are not something that is known about, but they give people the opportunity to come along and know that they are there for them. They come to voice their opinions. They might say, "There are roads needing fixed here and there".

People think that community councils are only small groups that meet up and do nothing for the community—they just sit and talk and do nothing else. However, in reality, they do a lot behind the scenes to improve the communities that we live in. It is important to get that bond between the council and the community council in order to get that trust in the community so that people come along and see the ins and outs of what we are doing for their communities. That is vital.

11:45

Also, it is important that all councillors in the area attend the meetings. In Rutherglen, where I am, people come from certain wards to see a councillor, and if they are not there, they think, "Oh, well. They're not here so I can't do anything about it". It is important to get across the message that, no matter who is or who is not there, your concern will have a voice and will be taken up by the council. It is important that that is known and that the message is spread more widely that people can come along from wherever they live in our area to see how it works. Get members in, too.

**The Convener:** Great. I think that that is really important. I thought that all councillors had to go to community council meetings—the ones who I know in my region certainly do.

I will move on now and bring in Ivan McKee. I am mindful of the time. I feel that we could do with many more hours than we have because you are all already sharing such rich things.

I also want to say to the witnesses that you should not necessarily assume that we will get on

to the issue that you want to talk about. If you have the mic, say it then. A colleague might have a question that you might answer, but bringing up another issue is fine.

**Ivan McKee:** The issue that I want to get your perspective on is community councils' relationships and how they work with other groups in your area, including community groups, third sector groups, development trusts—somebody has already mentioned those in perhaps not the most positive way so I would be interested to explore that and understand that a wee bit more—anchor organisations, such as housing associations and so on, which make up the tapestry and the ecosystem of organisations that are working together locally to further their communities. Who wants to start?

**Alastair Kennedy:** I cannot speak about development trusts, but I can speak about some of the groups that the JCC in Moray has set up. We have set up a few sub-groups. At the moment, we have the safer travel group and, I think, another one on road safety. Is that right, Debra?

**Debra Duke:** It is the transport forum.

**Alastair Kennedy:** We have quite a few of those sub-groups.

I also set up a participatory budgeting group some years ago, which has been very successful. I think that Dr Escobar touched on that this morning. We have now done seven exercises. Each time, we learn a bit, and, each time, we have been very successful. We have just started a new group that has half a million quid to disburse. Having that overarching body spreads the work and the effort.

Something else that was touched on this morning is that, a lot of the time, the people who are involved in a community council have full-time jobs and they get all this stuff thrown at them. How many hours can you spend on these things if you have a full-time job? Some of the rural community councils probably have six or seven members. That is ludicrous. How much work can six or seven people do, part-time?

In Elgin, we are lucky. We have up to 18 members. We have set up a committee system, so we are able to spread the work quite substantially. However, it is unfair to expect six or seven people to do what is required of them in the time that is allowed.

**Ewart McAuslane:** I go along with what has just been said. This morning, I have put up the new bus timetables and, this afternoon, I will be planting flowers in the barrels in the town centre. A lot of stuff goes on that people do not see.

I wanted to come in to clarify any negativity that may have come across in respect of the

development-trust model. We do not have a development-trust model in Tillicoultry, but what I am seeing in other areas in the county is largely entirely positive. The community centres are being taken over by development trusts and operated at least as well or perhaps, it could be argued, even better than had been done before. I am quite impressed by what is going on. That change may be something that we should welcome and organise.

**Steve Kerr:** Community councils in Edinburgh have various opportunities. I chair the north-west locality community planning partnership so there is an opportunity to be involved in strategic decisions that are made for that part of the city and there are other planning partnerships across the city.

I also chair the western neighbourhood network. The principal role of the network is administration of community grant funding. We can identify community grant opportunities, and we can identify organisations and individuals who have projects that have merit and benefit their communities. The western neighbourhood network has something like £40,000 to administer annually.

As for engagement, in all those fora, and with the third sector, we work collaboratively with their representatives. There are definitely good working relations with other voluntary sector organisations.

I agree about the time that is involved; it is challenging. I also represent the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils on the Edinburgh Partnership board. Meetings are held during the day and I have to take time to attend those meetings. It is an opportunity for community councils to be represented at the most strategic level across the city, so it is important that we are there. However, I will be honest and say that some of that is challenging.

Since I have the mic, I will do as you suggested, convener, and raise another issue. I want to put on record my strong feelings. I feel passionately about this area. We have talked about reform and rebuild. I was involved in the McIntosh commission's work. Although its recommendations were approved by COSLA and the Scottish Parliament, the subsequent years have not seen any significant change to community councils. Many of the recommendations that were made have not been implemented.

Frankly, I believe that we need to go back to the drawing board. We need to go back to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 and free up some of those opportunities and to remove some of the restrictions that were placed on community councils in the act. It is important that any change or reform to community councils needs to be under compulsion. Relying on local authorities across Scotland to implement change and reform

individually is optimistic. There needs to be an element of compulsion to reform community councils if we are going to reform them.

In addition, changes need to be compelling. Community councils often struggle for membership. Yes, people are often self-selecting, but if you did not have those people, a lot of community councils would struggle to do what they do. In terms of diversity and inclusion, and on making sure that we are reaching out and are representative of our communities, there needs to be a compelling offer. I do not think that we have that at the moment; that needs to be improved on.

As I said, we need to go back to the source material, look at the 1973 act and make those changes. A new bill need not be introduced; secondary legislation could cover that. I believe in reform or rebuild. If we are not going to change things in our 50th year, but things are not appreciated or desired, maybe we have reached the point of looking to rebuild.

**The Convener:** Before I bring others in, I just want to ask you about that reform and rebuild issue. Something that has been on my mind—Emma Swift talked about it in the previous evidence session—is the fact that community councils are unincorporated and the difficulties that that causes. Do we need to move to incorporation? It is my understanding that we have ended up with development trusts, partly because community councils do not have some of the same powers and abilities.

**Steve Kerr:** Absolutely. It comes back to my colleague's point about community asset transfers. We can be involved locally in agitating for a community asset transfer for a community centre—which we did, representing the community council—but we cannot be physically involved, which, quite honestly, is an inhibitor. That would be something that would be appreciated by the community, because we could be at the forefront of things. We do play a co-ordinating role, but I do not think that it is widely appreciated as it might be. So, my answer to your question is yes.

I should also have said something about the need for a body—that is, an association of community councils. I cannot think of anything else existing in statute in Scotland that does not have some form of national body for engaging with its peer group. We are unique in that respect. I note that, in its report, the McIntosh commission specifically referenced the establishment of an association of community councils and endorsed the idea of putting in place area associations—like EACC and that in West Lothian—that would feed into that body. It is all a bit of a patchwork and needs attention.

I think that Dr Escobar took most of my best lines, and I do not want to go back over what he said. However, I am completely in accord with his précis of where we sit with community councils.

**The Convener:** Thank you—that was very helpful. We will now hear from John Bachtler, Debra Duke and then Bill Pitt, who is online.

**John Bachtler:** First, on your question about relations with other community bodies, we find that such relations tend to be bilateral and issue-specific. However, we have found the establishment of a Cambuslang and Rutherglen community planning partnership group to feed into the board to be helpful, as it has brought together housing associations, development trusts and others, as well as key services. It has been really good not just for knowledge sharing but for allowing us to take practical steps. For example, at our last meeting, which was last week, the problem of vaping products came up. Initially, it was discussed as an environment problem, but the discussion then turned to health and recycling issues and, in turn, we looked at a number of practical ideas that we might be able to take forward.

I agree with Steve Kerr about compulsion with regard to local authorities and the reform of community councils, but I think that there are other ways of highlighting good practice. When Donald Stavert was talking about some of the outreach work that West Lothian was doing and its consultative approach, I was thinking, “This is amazing.” It would be helpful to recognise what local authorities are doing well in this area.

I will take advantage of your offer, convener, and say that, although I do not know the extent to which other people or other community councils are having problems with insurance cover, I can tell you that we have just found out that our local authority has withdrawn insurance cover for pretty much anything other than meetings and coffee mornings. Our cleaning up Cambuslang group, which has about 600 members, has suddenly found that litter picking is not covered; Cambuslang in bloom is not covered, either. It is a big issue that is going back and forth at the moment. Fortunately, we have a couple of insurance experts on our community council, but I do not know whether it is a universal problem. Perhaps people can get back to me afterwards if we do not want to hold things up.

**The Convener:** We are asking about the barriers and blocks to community councils being able to do things. It becomes absurd if it means that you cannot do your litter picking or, indeed, have your beautiful blooms. After all, I know that Forres in bloom in Moray is an incredible asset to the community. Thank you for throwing that into the conversation.

I see that Debra Duke wants to come in.

**Debra Duke:** With regard to working with other community groups, you will find that a lot of community councillors are on other community groups, too. As a result, relationships are essentially good, because those people can feed in from the other groups that they already sit on. However, it also means that they are spreading themselves quite thinly, because they are using up a lot of their time on lots of different work.

You mentioned Emma Swift’s comments about community councils being unincorporated. The fact that parish councils in England are recognised in statute as local authorities makes a big difference, because that is why they have tax-raising powers. As Jackie Weaver said, about 25 years ago, parish councils started using their tax-raising powers to play more of a part and do more work in their communities, but the big change in England was, I think, the professionalisation of parish clerks.

Parish councils have always had to employ a parish clerk and a responsible finance officer, but the role of clerk is now a professional job with its own organisation and union—the Society of Local Council Clerks—and its own qualification, the certificate in local council administration. When I started as a parish clerk, the council needed me to do that qualification, because they needed a qualified parish clerk to be able to get more powers under the Localism Act 2011. Had I not had that qualification, the parish council would not have been able to do certain things. Having that professional person to support parish councils, as well as having the county association and the national association, is fundamental.

12:00

It also helps with governance. The big thing that I want to support for the community councils in Moray is having strong governance behind them and ensuring that they have good governance documents and working practices. The fact is that community councillors are elected and volunteer their time, and it feels quite unfair to make them do a lot of training and a lot of work in order to clerk a meeting properly and do the administration behind it, but they need that governance and those working practices behind them in order to strengthen them.

Going back to what Alastair Kennedy said, I just point out that I work 20 hours a week; I have 17 established community councils, but I could have 20. I am just firefighting, and I am finding that I cannot put in place the proper support that the councils need. Emma Swift delivered a brilliant session of social media training to the north-east alliance of community council liaison officers last

year; it was a train-the-trainer session, but I have not had the time to pass that training on to the Moray councils.

Everyone is quite stretched, and no one has enough time or resources. If community councils had more resources to, say, employ secretaries, that would really strengthen their ability to carry out the work that they need to do.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that. I have also heard that clerking teams are the institutional memory of organisations, because they are the ones who document things, ensure that things are re-presented, highlight what needs to be considered and so on.

Donald Stavert wants to come in, after which we will move to questions from Willie Coffey.

**Donald Stavert:** On the question about working with other organisations, we, too, have found exactly what Debra Duke mentioned. Community councillors are involved with other organisations, and other organisations in which people are too busy to come anywhere near the community council still have good relationships with us.

In Bathgate, for instance, we decided with the local elected members that we needed a wider organisation to ensure that everybody was represented, to co-ordinate things and to keep people abreast of what was going on. People were applying for funds here, there and everywhere. So, along with the councillors, we formed the Bathgate together group, and we now have 40 organisations that come together every month—which I think is too much, but never mind. It covers everything—friends of the parks groups, the local business improvement district, the churches, the local bands, some of the shopkeepers and so on—and it brings all of these people together to thrash out where we want Bathgate to go in the future. Indeed, we think that it is going to provide a good basis for putting together some sort of place plan for Bathgate.

Incidentally, I would just say that place plans are a good idea, as is encouraging community councils to do them. It is unfortunate that there was no money associated with it, but we are doing our best to do it on a shoestring.

To respond to some of the things that Steve Kerr said and just to get my oar in—I do not think that those were the words you used, convener—I would say that we in West Lothian got excited when the “Democracy matters” initiative was on the go in 2019, and we had a big conference of all the West Lothian community councils. At the time, we were talking to the local authority, which was making submissions to the joint COSLA and Scottish Government initiatives, and it made it quite clear that it did not want to invent any new local body and that community councils could be

reinvented or reformed. However, it did not come across with any ideas, because it wanted to move at the same pace as everybody else in Scotland.

As a result, we had a discussion and came up with what we saw as a blueprint for the community council of the future, which was endorsed by all the community councils. I think that the blueprint has been circulated—and I hope that members of the committee will be able to get it from the clerk afterwards—but, basically, it put forward our proposals for plans, resources and powers. We described how we thought community councils could take advantage of the reform process to become more representative and democratic, and we also spoke about what it would take to bring the blueprint to life. One of the things that we then wanted was a Scottish conference but, of course, Covid came along and destroyed everything.

We are now resurrecting our blueprint and have invited all community councillors in Scotland to an online conference—with our admin grants, we could not afford to travel—on the morning of 10 June. We are not only putting our own ideas forward but looking for ideas from other people, too, because we do not think ours are the only ideas. Moreover, in our invitation, we asked people for their thoughts on a Scottish forum of community councils and the overwhelming—90 per cent—response has been yes. People have also been suggesting topics that we could discuss at Scotland level, and I do think that one of the outcomes of the conference will be that we end up trying to organise a Scottish forum.

**The Convener:** That sounds fantastic. I am sorry, Willie Coffey—I set you up, but I skipped over Bill Pitt. Bill, do you want to come in now?

**Bill Pitt:** I have been listening to what some of the other community councillors have been saying about budgets and that sort of thing, and I have to say that I look at what community councils are paid to operate, whether it be through admin grants or whatever vehicle, as a return on investment.

Someone on the previous panel said that there are something in the neighbourhood of 1,200 community councils in Scotland; if you look at the budget numbers—that is, at the admin grants received by the community councils from the local authority—you will see that, at the high end, they might get £1,000. In other words, £1.2 million of public money funds community councils throughout Scotland, and we can see how much Scotland and its communities gain from that little bit of money and that very small investment. Clearly, if what we are looking at is community councils being given more powers—or whatever the future might hold for them—we can only imagine what return we might get if the councils

had serious funding. That is just one thing that I wanted to mention.

Earlier, one gentleman talked about a community council receiving £250 a year. In the scheme of things—and bearing in mind what the Scottish and UK Governments spend—£250 a year is a travesty. I do not know what that particular community council gives back, but I just wanted to make that point.

My other point is also about the return on investment. How can community councils operate effectively on a £1,000 grant every year, given the responsibilities that they have for asset transfers and so on and the increased workload that goes along with them? They cannot, so we have to look at alternative methods and alternative sources of funding. It would be very helpful if community councils had some avenue or vehicle that they could access. There are many different funds for many different things, but a fund could be developed—sourced, perhaps, from wind farms that are being built offshore—that community councils could have access to for particular projects. The overall funding to community councils could remain relatively low, but if we had this bank, as it were, we could use it to access investment funds for community projects. That is just something that I would like to bring to the table for MSPs' consideration.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that, Bill. I have been wondering about something like that, too. Do community councils have the right to invest, or do you need that power?

**Bill Pitt:** I am not sure—I do not know if the right to invest is part of our remit or how it would work. What I have noticed from today's discussions is that all community councils work a little bit differently. No two community councils are the same in the obligations that they have, the way in which they try to source funds and so forth. The challenge is that we really cannot operate on a £1,000 budget; however, we could, if we had access to specific funding. I am thinking not about a land bank, per se, but about a bank of some sort—for lack of a better word—that a community council could go to with a project, which, if it was identified as being viable and good for the community, would be awarded funding.

I just wanted to throw that out as a possibility. You can see what Scotland already gets for £1.2 million—imagine what it would get in return if more funding were available.

**The Convener:** I think that we hear that point loud and clear. What we are picking up is that there is a potential for some sort of community funding to come out of ScotWind.

**Willie Coffey:** Given the time we have, I will ask just one question, about how the community

councils reach out to their communities to get their views. I am conscious of having Cambuslang and Rutherglen on either side of me here so I had better be careful about what I say.

Some of the critical voices that came out of the local governance review consultation described community councils as “unrepresentative”, “ineffective”, “reactive”, “self-interested” and “cliquey”. We have heard the exact opposite of that today from the engagement that you all are having with your communities. Some of your IT and social media reach-out is pretty impressive. However, I am interested in how you could improve and better your engagement with the local community, and, in particular, reach out to younger people and perhaps minority communities. Could I have a couple of people's views on that?

**Steve Kerr:** Going first to your last point about young people, I say that one of the things that we did with the community grant that we had was to ring fence money for young people to decide what they wanted to in their areas, a neighbourhood network grant funding opportunity. We allocated £5,000 for projects that young people could submit and manage and we took a hands-off approach—the young people met as a group to decide on the priority for their area. You can have a perception about what is important to young people, so the experience has been an edifying one for us. I think that local councillors found the exchanges about what young people were hoping for to be quite robust, and it worked particularly well.

As for reaching out to the community more generally—I think that Jackie Weaver said something about this at the end of her presentation—people tend to come because they have particular issues. In the west of Edinburgh, for instance, the issues that people come forward with are about transport, mobility, house building and so on. Engagement tends to be episodic. If I were being honest about the things that people care about, I would point to things such as cycle ways and the mobility plan, which excite views for and against across Edinburgh. The community council has a role in managing that and making sure that people have the opportunity to express their views, and community councils in the west have to be involved in that.

Community councils' role is about recognising the importance of certain issues that matter to their community and harnessing some of that enthusiasm. If that happens, you get people coming forward to engage.

**The Convener:** Thanks. A few other people want to come in on this. I will go with Alastair Kennedy first, and then John Bachtler.

Just before we do that, let me say that, although time has been an issue, you have answered a lot of the questions that we had. Therefore, what we will do now is just go round you on engagement and then give a little bit of time at the end to see if there is anything else that we have to hear.

**Alastair Kennedy:** On the issue of engaging young people, we accessed £150,000 from the investing in communities fund two years ago and gave £50,000 to the youngsters to run their own exercise, and they were brilliant. I hope to achieve the same thing this time around and that we can then tap into that group of youngsters and twist their arms to and get some of them on the various community councils. I am hopeful that will be successful.

The only trouble with youngsters, of course, is that they disappear to college or university, so we can have them for only a short time. They are like a breath of fresh air because they have a completely different perspective on things such as planning. I am hoping that we can achieve something through this PB exercise.

12:15

**The Convener:** It sounds like a tremendous thing, because you are giving them the agency to do something.

**Alastair Kennedy:** We did not actually manage to finish vetting their applications at first, and they came back off holiday to do it. That was really excellent.

**The Convener:** Brilliant. That is amazing.

**John Bachtler:** Some years ago, we invited some people from the local youth centre to come along to a meeting. I think that it was probably the most boring event that they had experienced in their lives, which is not surprising, given some of the issues that we were discussing. Seriously, however, what we have done over the past few years is, first, engage with the local youth and family learning services group, universal connections, to invite those on the community development degree course at the University of Glasgow to be involved in specific projects—it is like an internship for them—when we have needed to have some community engagement, analysis or other project work done.

We have a paid post for a minutes secretary and, for the past seven years, that has always been held by a young person, which has been quite successful. In general, our experience has been that involving younger people in specific projects, particularly environmental projects, has been the most successful approach. We have had some schools partnerships that have been very good.

**Barry Cathie:** I think it is important to bring young people in because it gives them some experience of how community councils work and gets them involved in their communities through things such as litter-picking projects, community events and so on. When they leave school at 18 or so, they can look into politics, come to the meetings, see how the system works, get experience and learn all about it. It is important to get young people involved because the members of my community council some are a certain age—over 30—and it would be good to have young people, of 18 to 25 or 30. It would also give those young people the experience of getting into the community, how to involve the community, how the community works and what is involved.

We need a voice of young people in the community. At the moment, there is not much for them to get involved in. They cannot really voice their concerns. If they come to meetings on subjects that they are interested in, their voices will be heard and they can bring their experience to us and tell us things that they know that we do not know. It will also give them training in how to become involved, and how to become a community councillor when the time comes—I think that people need to be over 18 to get elected. It is good to have that because, as I say, it gives them a voice and improves their image in the community as they become better people.

I know that some people think that young people just cause trouble but, in reality, young people have experiences and learning that mean that they have something to put back into the community. People will see that they want to learn and engage in the community, become better people and improve their community. There is also an important aspect of young people and old people—different generations—mixing and working together. It is good to see that.

**The Convener:** Yes, building multigenerational relationships is important.

**Shayne McLeod:** We took a very similar tack to Barry Cathie and John Bachtler. Here in Shetland, the community council had a drive to invite a lot of young people and young organisations along to meetings. We also tapped into assistance from the member of the Scottish Youth Parliament, who was a great help to us over the course of two or three months, when we had young people coming in expressing their opinions and views on how there was a bit of a divide between the community council members and the younger generation.

Through the OPEN project here in Shetland, in which I and other community council members am a mentor along with other community council members, we now have a group of the younger generation who have now begun to set up their own board. That entails them getting their own

committee and board up and running, and they will be specifically engaging with their own youth group and other members of the younger generation here in Shetland. In liaison with the local community councils and the council, they can express their views on what could be done better and what things could be altered in Shetland to make it more environmentally friendly for everybody, to get all the groups working together a lot better than they are at the moment.

**The Convener:** That sounds great. I am interested in that issue, and I have been racking my brains about how to get young people engaged, so there are a couple of things that I would be interested to hear your views on. I am going to open up the discussion as we move to a close, so you do not necessarily have to respond to what I say—there might be other things that you want to add.

One thought that I had was about collaboration with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. People are going through its scheme, and it has a community aspect. Also, I have been wondering about the idea of universal basic income, although I know that that would be a big thing that might involve the rebuilding of the whole of Scotland. We have talked about the amount of time that people have to put in to do this properly. If people had some kind of fundamental financial support, a more diverse group would be able to participate much more in what we need to do, which is helping Scotland plc do its thing and provide for our communities.

Along with that, I have been thinking about how the Improvement Service provides training once people are in a community council, and I wonder whether we need to teach young people at high school about facilitation skills, decision making, proposal making and how to go into situations of tension with people with whom they do not agree—how to move through that process rather than getting stuck in being adversarial. I feel that teenagers should learn those kinds of skills. My sense is that, at the moment, schools still tend to teach just to the job. Of course, it is not totally limited to that but, if we taught to the community—how to be a member of a community and civil society—that would be great for people in their job, but they would also have the underpinnings to be part of the community.

I have been racking my brains about those issues, but maybe you think differently from me, as you are actually involved in those experiences.

Who wants to come in on that briefly? Debra Duke's hand shot up.

**Debra Duke:** One issue that was spoken about earlier was planning support for community councils. That is not just about how to respond to

simple applications, because most community councils are okay with that; it is about the bigger applications that have lots of technical detail. Last year, Speyside community council dealt in quick succession with some really big applications for new maltings, new biomass digesters and new woodlands. It was pretty much beyond the community councillors to read and understand the documents so that they could respond in the right way. Community councillors worked very hard and put in responses, but they really needed technical support, and there was nowhere to go for that.

That leads me to the idea of a national organisation. I am a big fan of networking, as it helps to reduce workloads to an extent, through sharing ideas and documents. If someone else has a document and you can have a copy and tweak it to suit you, that makes things much easier, and you can also then keep talking to each other.

You talked about schools, convener. I used to be in democratic services in a district council that carried out local democracy week events in schools every year in October. However, that requires time and resources. It would be brilliant if we could do that—I would love to be able to go into schools to show what community councils can do and to talk about elections, but I do not know who has the capacity to do that sort of thing. However, I like the idea of teaching to the community—that would be fabulous.

**The Convener:** That point about technical support for planning is critical.

Steve Kerr wants to come in.

**Steve Kerr:** I will be very brief—I promise.

I am a great believer in international examples. As part of my role in my day job, I cover the United States. In 2008, I was in an Obama campaign office in Virginia, and it was chocka with young people—high school students—who were manning phones. They were phoning people to get them to engage in voting and asking about voting intent. I assumed that it was because of the enthusiasm around the Obama campaign at that time in 2008, but that community engagement role was part of graduating from high school. They got credit for taking part in such activities, which was the principal reason why they were there. It struck me that there was something to be said for having an element of the high school curriculum that involves community engagement and the civic role. Maybe we could adopt something like that.

I will stop there, as I promised to be brief.

**The Convener:** That is a great point.

Are there any other final words?

**Donald Stavert:** I have just a quickie on the question of youth. A head teacher from a local Bathgate academy who is part of our Bathgate together group persuaded some of her senior pupils to talk to us and give us feedback on what they thought about the town, and they hit us right between the eyes. Basically, they said, "There's nothing in Bathgate for us—nothing. We can go into Livingston, which is expensive and not terribly friendly and so on, but there's nothing in Bathgate."

We were really upset about that. We managed to get a local theatre to carve out space for a youth cafe. Our local gala committee—the procession committee—has run discos for youths. We put a proposal to the three head teachers—our kids are spread out among three different schools—for a youth community council for the senior-level students. They all came back and said that it was a great idea and that the pupils were interested, but it was just the wrong time of the year, because they were studying for their exams. However, we are resurrecting that for the start of next year and we are going to try to put together a youth council. If it works in Bathgate, we will try to spread the idea across West Lothian.

We really did not have a clue about what was going on with the youth, who were very disaffected with their town.

**The Convener:** That sounds tremendous.

Did I hear somebody else say something? Barry, do you want to come in?

**Barry Cathie:** I just have a thought about young people. At the moment, there is a gap, but they are free to be involved in the community council more often. They can come and they can learn, and that way we know about their experiences from learning in school, and they bring that to the councils.

We have a youth council as well, so kids are coming off the streets and coming to learn about their community and about politics. They can come in and learn about how the councils work and the structure. They can then maybe go from there to provide training to young people in school and other places, and see how that goes. That could be training on council work or councillors, or that kind of aspect.

**The Convener:** So it is about learning on the job, in a way.

**Barry Cathie:** Yes.

**The Convener:** That is great.

John Bachtler wants to come in.

**John Bachtler:** I have a final point, if that is okay. Just standing back, I wanted to personally encourage the committee to go for significant

reform, because there is a real democratic deficit. In my day job, I work on regional local development across Europe. We have virtually the poorest community empowerment and representation structures in Europe, given the absence of a community level of influence. We have towns of 10,000, 20,000 and 50,000 people that are without any form of self-government. That should be a source of embarrassment to us as a modern democratic European nation. I encourage the committee to think radically.

**The Convener:** Thank you for that encouragement. We have an opportunity in that regard with the proposed local democracy bill.

I will bring the session to a close, although clearly we could discuss more. I thank at least one of you for mentioning community planning partnerships. We have just finished a piece of work on that, and we will soon publish our report. Community councils play a role in those partnerships, and should perhaps play a greater role than they do.

Thank you for joining us—the session has been really useful. I will end by saying happy birthday to all the community councils in Scotland.

At the start of the meeting, we agreed to take the rest of the items on the agenda in private.

12:30

*Meeting continued in private until 12:30.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---

