



The Scottish Parliament  
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SPICe Briefing

Pàipear-ullachaidh SPICe

# The Role of Lived Experience in the Scottish Parliament

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This briefing presents the findings of research undertaken as part of an Academic Fellowship based with Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) between January and July 2025. In this research, Dr Clementine Hill O'Connor (University of Glasgow) explored how lived experience has been integrated into the scrutiny work of the Scottish Parliament. [A separate case study volume](#) has been published to give context to this overarching research briefing.



4 November 2025  
SB 25-55

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# Introduction

“Lived experience” has become a commonly used term across academia, policy and practice. In its broadest term, it refers to a type of knowledge that comes from having direct and everyday experience of an issue. The roots of lived experience as a concept are varied and come from a variety of academic, practitioner and activist traditions. As such, the term is applied in a range of different ways. Lived experience is increasingly sought by parliamentarians and policymakers as a source of evidence that can offer powerful and unique insights (Geddes, 2023, Hill O'Connor et al. 2023). This can, in turn, play a role in co-produced and co-designed outputs or services. Notably, in Scotland, [the Scottish Government approach to service design](#) is based on this principle. In other areas, lived experience is sought after in the form of using peer workers, and is common practice in drug and alcohol recovery (Emery et al., 2024, Scottish Drugs Forum, 2022) and in mental health services (Parr, 2023).

Within the context of the Scottish Parliament, lived experience has been a key part of broader discussions about how to bring a more diverse range of voices into the work of the Parliament. In May 2022, the Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee launched an [inquiry into Public Participation](#). The aim of this inquiry was to understand “how people's voices are heard in the work of the Parliament”. The culmination of this work was a [Participation Blueprint](#), which sets out an approach to embedding deliberative democracy in the work of the Scottish Parliament during Session 7 (2026 to 2031). [The Parliament debated and agreed unanimously to the Blueprint in a vote on 3 June 2025](#). Lived experience featured across the debate and within the Blueprint itself. For instance, [Maurice Golden MSP considered](#) the types of citizen panels described within the Blueprint as a more effective way of hearing from people with lived experience, serving as an “interesting portal for the gaining and gleaning of lived experience”. [Maggie Chapman MSP invited Parliament to](#) “Imagine committee inquiries that begin not just with scoping sessions among MSPs but with co-designed workshops involving people with lived experience”.

Lived experience, and its role in scrutiny, also featured as a theme for discussion across the [Committee Effectiveness inquiry](#) led by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. During this inquiry, MSPs, as well as academic and expert witnesses, highlighted the importance of including people with lived experience in scrutiny due to the specific insights they offer, and to give democratic legitimacy to the committees and Parliament more broadly.

In the context of these developments, it is important to give due consideration to the ways that lived experience currently features in the work of the committees. Therefore, this fellowship project aimed to understand the ways that Parliament staff members and MSPs use this form of evidence in their work, the value that is placed on it, and the specific role that lived experience plays in scrutiny. Bringing together data from interviews, observations and analysis of documents the research sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is ‘lived experience’ understood as a form of evidence in parliamentary process?
2. What are the methods and processes through which lived experience features in the work of the Scottish Parliament?

3. What guidance and/or frameworks can be put into place to support the integration of lived experience into parliamentary business in ways that align with principles of ethical participation and rigorous research practice?

To accompany this briefing, [a separate case study volume](#) has been published. The three case studies included each offer an in-depth description of one of the many processes through which lived experience features in the work of Parliamentary Committees. The case studies examine engagement processes undertaken as part of:

- [The Social Justice and Social Security Committee's inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship](#)
- [The Health and Sport Committee's Stage 1 scrutiny of the Right to \(Addiction\) Recovery \(Scotland\) Bill](#)
- [The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's Stage 1 scrutiny of the Housing \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

As with all guest publications, the findings and conclusions of both this case study volume and the full report are the views of the author and not those of SPICe, or of the Scottish Parliament.

## Context - Parliamentary committees

This section sets out a brief overview of the committee system of the Scottish Parliament and how it is supported to give context to the work explored in the project and the different roles and processes referenced.

The Scottish Parliament has 15 committees, most of which focus on specific areas of policy. These committees will be responsible for the scrutiny of legislation and policy, which typically takes the form of an inquiry process. Some of this work will be allocated to committees, i.e., in the form of a draft Bill, others will be determined by Scottish Government timetables (such as scrutiny of the Budget), and other inquiries will be proactively pursued by committees. Committees manage their own work programmes and decide how they will approach scrutiny of an issue or bill, including the timetable and how they will gather evidence. [More detail on how committees work is available on the Parliament's website.](#)

Committees are supported by teams of clerks, typically made up of 3-4 staff who support that committee. Clerks lead on supporting committees and managing their work programmes, but also draw on a wider support team from other offices:

- Research support is delivered on a subject-specific basis by researchers from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe). Researchers help to familiarise committees with policy context by providing research briefings, advice, and analysis of evidence provided to the committee.
- Participation Specialists from the Parliament's Participation and Communities Team (PACT) connect committees with the communities who are impacted by policy through activities like engagement events, lived experience panels, and deliberative activities such as people's panels.
- Communications Managers from the Parliamentary Communications Office (PCO) support committees by developing communications plans and creating content to share committee work and opportunities to get involved.

A researcher from the SPICe may predominantly support one committee, or may work with several. Participation and communications officers typically support 2-3 committees concurrently. All these staff are involved in private briefings to committees, and at weekly staff team meetings, and collaborate to support the committee's aspirations.

## Methods

This research was undertaken as part of a SPICe academic fellowship between January and July 2025. Following a period of informal discussions and a desk-based review of parliamentary committee activities it was agreed that the research would focus on three scrutiny activities which could demonstrate how committees engage with people who have lived experience of the issues under scrutiny. The findings from qualitative research on the three activities have been **written up as case studies**, which have been published separately as a case study volume.

This report focuses on the findings that relate to broader themes that were common across the case studies, and offers insights into the overall understandings and use of parliamentary committee processes and activities that engage people with lived experience. It brings together data from interviews, observations and documentary analysis as set out in the subsections below. The work has been carried out in partnership with SPICe, with input and support from PACT and committee clerking teams.

## Interviews

Interviews were carried out with 20 self-selecting individuals, including 16 from the Scottish Parliament (both MSPs and staff), and four participants who were involved in a process of informal engagement sessions related to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee's inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship.

The interviews covered questions on the specific processes covered in the case studies, as well as broader questions about other processes that participants had been involved in, and their work with, and understanding of, lived experience in relation to their role.

The table below sets out a full breakdown of number of participants by role. The final column denotes the reference that will be used when directly quoting these participants. This offers an indication of the individuals' roles and responsibilities whilst protecting the anonymity of participants.

**Table 1: Participants by role**

| Participant role                               | Number  | Reference used when direct quoting from these participants |
|--|---|--|
| MSP/Committee member                           | 7   | Committee member   |
| Clerk  | 4 (2 in joint interview)                                  | Parliament staff member                                    |
| SPICe  | 1 (in joint interview with PACT)                          |  |
| PACT   | 4 (1 in joint interview with SPICe, 2 in joint interview) |  |
| Participants from informal engagement sessions | 4 (focus group)   | Participant from informal engagement session               |
| Total  | 20  |  |

## Documentary analysis

The documentary analysis focused initially on the specific case studies, with the publicly

available records related to these being reviewed and analysed. This included Official Reports (the formal written record) of committee meetings, notes of informal engagement sessions, and Stage 1 and Stage 2 legislative scrutiny reports and summaries. Where appropriate this also included Official Reports of Parliament debates. Working closely with SPICe and PACT, it was also possible to access internal documents, including case studies and evaluations that have been used to support the development of the various processes that bring people with lived experience of relevant issues into the work of committees.

## **Technical analysis**

All the transcripts from interviews and documents from the desk-based research were uploaded into a qualitative analysis software programme called Nvivo. A coding framework was developed based on the research questions and an evaluative approach to exploring the opportunities, challenges and recommendations across the case studies. Further codes were developed thematically through a close reading of the documents.

# Findings

## Definitions of lived experience

There was a set of broad definitions that interviewees used to describe what lived experience meant for them.

“ People who have actually had the experience of a system, whatever system we're looking at”

Committee member

“ People who are or have been caught in the trap of addiction” (in relation specifically to the engagement around the Right to (Addiction) Recovery).”

Committee member

In sum, lived experience refers to the direct experience, past or present, of the issue(s) covered in a bill that is under scrutiny or is the focus of a committee inquiry.

When prompted, participants recognised that similar types of information can, and do, come from other sources, including third sector organisations or by individuals contributing to calls for views. However, there was significant value placed on *direct* input from individuals.

“ Informing parliamentarians by people who are living with the issues the committee is dealing with...not the representative bodies...individuals themselves who can tell their stories on their own.”

Parliament staff member

This was a theme that recurred throughout the interviews and will be returned to later in the report.

Some interviewees, when talking more broadly about the different ways in which lived experience informs their work and/or plays a role in committee work, referenced examples of general forms of engagement and fact finding with the public, and other scrutiny activities. For example, visits to community centres and the submission of petitions to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. This suggests that in some cases, there is a broader understanding and conceptualisation of lived experience.

## Increased use of 'lived experience'

Across the board there was recognition of the increased use of what is referred to as 'lived experience' in the work of the parliament, and specifically within committees. The creation (in 2021, following pilot work) and ongoing resourcing of the Participation and Communities Team (PACT) was used as an example of the commitment that has been made to bringing a more diverse set of voices into scrutiny processes.

Some Parliament staff pointed to increased calls from committee members to bring people with lived experience of the issue under scrutiny into the scrutiny process. For example:

“ It's become more and more common...members ask for lived experience more and more.”

Parliament staff member

Staff and MSPs highlighted examples of positive working relationships between SPICe, PACT and clerks who have successfully worked together to develop approaches to engagement with people with lived experience. There was a sense that as the use of lived experience in scrutiny had increased, the skills and capacity of committee support teams, and effective integration and consideration of evidence from lived experience perspectives into scrutiny had also increased:

“ [We're] getting a lot better at acknowledging it and using it in a more considered way.”

Committee member

[Evidence from the case studies](#) highlights some examples of good practice, and points to some early indications that the input of lived experience has supported productive and meaningful scrutiny.

## **Processes to generate and incorporate lived experience**

The primary focus of the research has been to explore three specific processes that were used within the scrutiny work of parliamentary committees. In reality, during interviews Committee members and parliament staff members highlighted a variety of other processes when talking more broadly about the role of lived experience in the context of their work. All these processes assume that there will be a direct interaction between committees and individuals with lived experience of the issues that are the focus of scrutiny.

However, the documentary analysis of inquiry reports, Stage 1 reports and committee meeting transcripts also highlighted a wider variety of processes through which the lived experience of individuals can feed into parliamentary work. These are forms of input which do not rely on direct interaction between individuals with lived experience and committee members and/or Parliament staff. During the interviews, questions were posed to participants to explore the relative value of these different forms of input. The subsequent sections explore these different forms before turning to considerations of the relative value of the different types of input.

### **Direct engagement with people with lived experience**

During the interviews Parliament staff and committee members were encouraged to think about other examples of using lived experience that they had supported or participated in as part of their roles. The table below shows some of the many examples that interviewees referred to in interviews. It does not represent an exhaustive list, rather it is intended to show the variety of formats, location and outputs that exist within this space and the range of topics that are covered. This is a snapshot that, when read alongside the more detailed case studies, offers an insight into the ways that lived experience feeds into the work of committees and highlights some of the features that will be referred to throughout the rest of the report.

**Table 2: Examples of processes used in past engagement with people with lived experience**

| Process  | Description/Link to example  |
|--|--|
| Facilitated round tables (online)  | Used in <a href="#">Stage 1 scrutiny of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill</a> in May 2025.   |
| World Café (in-person, in a community-based organisation)                                    | Used in an <a href="#">inquiry on asylum seekers</a> , led by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee. This took place at Maryhill Integration Network in Glasgow in June 2023. Different themes related to the asylum-seeking experience were discussed on different tables. Participants were invited to move around the relevant tables to share their experiences with Committee members at each of the tables. An anonymous note on each of the themes was published on the Scottish Parliament website. |
| Informal focus group (in-person, in Scottish Parliament)                                     | Undertaken as part of an inquiry into the experiences of kinship carers by the Social Justice and Social Security Committee in March 2022. Five kinship carers were invited into the Parliament to meet with members of the Committee. An anonymous note of the issues raised was made of the meeting and <a href="#">published on the Committee's website</a> .   |
| Roundtable with service users and service providers (in-person, in community-based services) | The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee visited a service in Aberdeen as part of its <a href="#">Stage 1 scrutiny of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill</a> in November 2022. A similar visit was made to a financial support service for women experiencing economic abuse for the inquiry into the considerations when leaving an abusive relationship. There was no public note of these visits, but they were referenced in committee meetings.   |
| Guided conversations (in-person, in Scottish Parliament)                                     | The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee met with individuals to understand the experience of people in Scotland who are living with HIV. There was no public note of the meeting, but it is <a href="#">referenced on the inquiry webpage</a> .   |

## Lived experience through consultations

Prior to any inquiry or Stage 1 scrutiny, committees typically run a "call for views" which invites individuals and organisations to submit responses to questions related to the bill or inquiry through Citizen Space. The call is open for between 6-12 weeks, depending on the scrutiny timetable, and then the responses are usually summarised by a member of SPICe (this depends on the volume of responses and resource available). This summary is published either as a stand-alone document (e.g. [Housing Bill summary of evidence](#)) or as part of a larger briefing note, bringing together the responses from the call for views with other background sources and evidence (such as for the [Right to Recovery Bill](#)).

Calls for views are shared via committee newsletters and mailing lists, and through committee and Parliament social media channels, as well as being listed alongside all open calls for views on the Parliament's website. Individuals and organisations are invited to respond to the calls, and are self-selecting. There are no claims to be representative, and quantitative analysis is reported with a standard note of caution. For example, in the summary of the call for views on the Housing (Scotland) Bill the introduction clearly states:

“ This paper summarises the key issues raised in the responses to the call for views. It should be noted that as respondents are self-selecting, they are not necessarily reflective of the population as a whole. Any quantitative data used in this summary should be read with this in mind. The intention of this paper is not to be exhaustive, rather it is to provide an overview of the main issues raised in the submissions.”

[SPICe summary of call for views on the Housing \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

The call for views for the three processes that are the focus of this research did not ask

respondents to specify whether they had lived experience of the issues that were the focus of the call. However, given the extent of the responses to some of the calls it might be safe to assume that there are people among the respondents with lived experience. The call for views on the Housing (Scotland) Bill received 300 responses, 60% of which were from individuals. In addition, there were 2,332 individuals who signed their names in support of a submission from Living Rent, a tenants' union. Based on the definition of "people directly affected by the issue under scrutiny", it could be argued that many of these are examples of people with lived experience of the housing system who are contributing to the process of scrutiny. Similarly, the call for views on the Right to (Addiction) Recovery Bill received 122 responses, 59% of which were from individuals. The call for views on the Inquiry into Financial Considerations of Leaving an Abusive Relationship received 58 responses, 22 of which were from individuals.

In the context of an overall increase in the use of lived experience to inform policy and practice, through both panels and research, it has become common for organisational responses to include references to lived experience. For example, the summary of the call for views on Right to (Addiction) Recovery Bill cited the Scottish Recovery Consortium as having "raised concerns from individuals with lived experience" (p.35) and directly quoted the reference made by Glasgow Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP) to the concerns raised by the Lived and Living Experience (LLE) cohort within the partnership (p. 42).

Some of the organisational responses to the Inquiry into the Financial Considerations of Leaving an Abusive Relationship made clear reference to having consulted with survivors (in the case of Scottish Women's Aid) or made extensive use of individual case studies to illustrate key points (in the case of Amina). This is also something that was evident throughout formal evidence sessions across all three case studies, as illustrated in the next section.

## **Lived experience via organisational representatives**

Analysis of the committee meetings relating to the three case studies showed that a variety of organisations bring the perspectives and voices of people with lived experience into the evidence they give to the committee in public evidence sessions. The table sets out some of the examples of organisations that support, represent and/or deliver services to groups impacted by the Bill or Inquiry in question, and the ways in which they included insights from people with lived experience into their responses to questions from the committees.

**Table 3: Examples of organisations providing evidence on lived experience**

| Comment  | Organisation                              | Committee  |
|--|---|--|
| “I can give the example of a renter called Tony, who has engaged with the RentBetter research since 2021. When he first engaged, he was unemployed and his partner was working part time, which meant that they struggled to afford their rent and got into debt. Their home was in a poor state of repair, with damp and a broken boiler, and Tony had mental health problems, which meant that he struggled to deal with that [...] Two years later, when Tony spoke to the researchers again, he told them about the immense stress of finding another place. He almost became homeless, only managing to find a new place in the final hour. He described the stress as being like a bucket of cold water and said that he was frozen in shock.” | Nationwide Foundation                     | 11/6/2024 – Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee – Stage 1 scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill                     |
| “[T]he other big factor for quite a lot of women who are accessing services is rechargeable repairs, where the abuse perpetrator has damaged their property. That can be a significant cost. [...] To give a bit of context, we had one relatively recent example in which there was £25,000-worth of damage to a property. That is a significant sum of money. We are talking about women who are already in economic crisis and have limited income, so that debt would have been completely inappropriate. The property had been significantly damaged and painted black inside—everything, including the furniture, kitchen worktops, toilet and walls, was painted black. It was a really oppressive situation.”                                | South Lanarkshire Council                 | 1/4/2025 – Social Justice and Social Security Committee – Inquiry into Financial Considerations of Leaving an Abusive Relationship |
| “[C]oncern about disruption to the MAT standards was one of the strongest pieces of feedback that we received from our reference groups and people with lived experience across the country.”  | Glasgow City Alcohol and Drug Partnership | 25/3/2025 – Health, Social Care and Sport Committee – Stage 1 scrutiny of the Right to (Addiction) Recovery (Scotland) Bill        |

The examples within the table above are in line with the broad definitions of lived experience previously set out, i.e., lived experience refers to the direct experience of the issue(s) being explored and scrutinised. It also has some of the characteristics that are deemed valuable and distinctive. For example, offering specific insights into the ways in which policies are directly experienced by the people that they are designed to help. Examples like the one from South Lanarkshire Council also hold power in the emotional response that they have the potential to evoke. However, as will be discussed in the following sections, additional value is placed on hearing from individuals directly. It is notable then, that although lived experience is featured in the scrutiny process through indirect methods, it is not necessarily conceptualised by committee members and Parliament staff in the same way as hearing directly from an individual.

## Overall function of lived experience in parliamentary processes

The analysis of interviews and documents show that the overall ambition and purpose for the inclusion of lived experience as a form of evidence in Parliament was framed in terms of two functions:

1. To improve the quality of the scrutiny process and deliver better recommendations (in the case of an inquiry) and meaningful engagement with a Bill in order to shape

amendments.

2. To deliver on core principles of democratic engagement.

The following sections address each in turn, exploring connections and tensions before outlining the specific value that was placed on input from people with lived experience, in comparison to other sources of evidence.

## Lived experience to improve scrutiny

When asked to consider the purpose of lived experience in their work, the committee members who were interviewed were clear that it offered valuable insight into the reality of how policies are implemented:

“ So I think you can have great policies, you know, all of us have policies that we need to implement, but actually, to actually hear when you face those issues...how does it actually work in practice? And what does it feel like in practice?”

Committee member

“ What we want from the people with lived experiences, their experiences of how the Scottish Government policy has been implemented and how it affects them, or how it doesn't, where they're seeing gaps, where that might be little things that could be improved, or big things that could be improved for them.”

Committee member

“ ... it's about hearing as much as possible, because that's one of the feedback loops where we understand is a system actually working or not for people.”

Committee member

Input from people with lived experience of particular issues was viewed as the best source of information where there were gaps in existing, or proposed policies. This in turn, gave committees the evidence needed to effectively hold the Government to account, and to draw conclusions and make recommendations.

As illustrated in the case studies, there are some difficulties in tracking the impact of lived experience (or indeed any other single source of evidence) on the specific outcomes of the scrutiny processes i.e., through report recommendations, proposed Bill amendments and votes at different bill stages.

However, there are still clear indications that many of the issues that are raised by people with lived experience during their engagement with Parliament are influential for committee members. There were a range of instances across the interviews when committee members recalled specific interactions and the ways that these had shaped, or reshaped, their conceptualisation of an issue. For example, as set out in [the Right to \(Addiction\) Recovery Bill case study](#), one Committee member described how they had adapted their line of questions after the engagement session with people with lived experience of alcohol/drug addiction.

In other examples:

- A committee member referred to an engagement that had “altered [their] mindset completely”.
- Another member said that the engagement session had been significant in the way

that it “crystallised” the issue and made them realise what the problem really was.

- An MSP described how the interaction had “really opened [their] eyes” to an issue and made them say “Oh my God. Of course...”.
- One of the Parliament staff member who, by the nature of their role work closely with committees on a regular basis and observe many of the lived experience engagement sessions noted that they often see the way that these interactions can:

“ influence the questions they ask in the formal session. This may not be obvious to people who weren't in the room [during the engagements with people with lived experience] but I see it and I see the influences, how it obviously can change their thinking.”

Parliament staff member

## Democratic principles

The link between involvement of people with lived experience and core democratic principles was also clear when committee members and Parliament staff members spoke about why lived experience was important in their work. They referred to the ambitions of Scottish Parliament more broadly:

“ I think the Scottish Parliament as a whole, like as part of its strategy wants to engage more like with the public and wants to hear from the public.”

Parliament staff member

Success was also framed in terms of engagement and democratic values:

“ I think what success looks like it that people feel engaged in the parliamentary procedure and that they have a voice in being able to shape policy, legislation and budgeting. Because, you know, we are a democracy and its got to be more than just electing somebody in the local constituency, you should be able to engage with the body that is elected.”

Parliament staff member

Others valued the way in which involving people with lived experience brought those people into the Parliament building. One committee member described the process of deciding where to conduct an engagement session which concluded with a session that was held in the Parliament because:

“ in the end it was like actually there is something important about bringing people to the Parliament and saying this is your place.”

Committee member

Fundamentally, the involvement of people with lived experience in the work of the Parliament was recognised as an important way to engage with and involve citizens, giving democratic legitimacy to the work.

These two core functions of lived experience were, for some, interconnected in how they articulated the value and purpose of lived experience in the work of committees:

“ to me it is vitally important for a number of reasons. One we're delivering the optimum bit of policy and also there is that sense of ownership about it as well.”

Committee member

Whilst clearly connected within this articulation of the role and value of lived experience, it is important to reflect that the *direct* and in person input of people with lived experience is not necessarily the only form of evidence that could fulfil this function. As noted in previous sections the desk-based research illustrated the ways that lived experience features in calls of views and in formal evidence sessions via organisations.

## The unique characteristics and value of lived experience

There were a series of specific characteristics of lived experience that were valued and seen as unique to this form of evidence. Throughout the interviews people referred to the “power” and “impact” of lived experience. It was seen to offer a new type of knowledge by bridging the gap between what can be abstract concepts and theory of what a bill or policy being explored through an inquiry should achieve, and the reality of what this looks and feels like on the ground. Fundamental to the value that was placed on lived experience was the route through which lived experience was fed into the work of committees. When comparing some of the different formats it was clear that hearing *directly* from an individual was the most important feature.

### Power and impact

Throughout the interviews, committee members and Parliament staff members spoke about the power of hearing from people with lived experience. One Parliament staff member described perceiving how memorable it was for committee members:

“ [M]embers will often refer back to informal evidence, but they won't refer back to formal evidence. Like in some ways, like some of the formal evidence, you know, is written there, it can be quite academic [...] some story or some experience that a person before them has you know, talked them through has a greater impact for some reason. You know, they remember that, or they remember that particular person.”

Parliament staff member

The power of hearing lived experience directly was also described by one committee member as a ‘motivator’ for action, and another discussed the key role it can play in terms of influencing and informing amendments to improve a bill. Even in the context of one Parliament staff member describing the hierarchy of evidence that exists in the language of ‘formal versus informal’ evidence, they said that once committee members have “seen it, or heard it, or spoken to people ... it'll be the thing they remember more than the formal panel”.

### Reality and grounding

Some of the power of lived experience was perceived to come from the “reality” or “grounding” that these insights offered. They were valued for encouraging committees to

move from the abstract language of an inquiry or bill to the “real life” or “coal face” of the way that an issue might be experienced on a day-to-day basis. As described by a Parliament staff member:

“ it's [lived experience] the concrete representation of particular issues and it just means that something that's a theoretical policy issue, a particular point suddenly becomes a story. And so it's like it's it becomes 3D, it becomes, you know, a person had this issue in that place in that way [...] I guess it's more memorable, but it's also makes it clear because it's, it's human, suddenly it's not a thing that's written on a piece of paper. Its somebody a real person.”

Parliament staff member

This was also reflected in comments from a committee member who said that whilst “we're busy designing legislation at this kind of abstract conceptualisation level”, hearing from people with lived experience allows committees to ask, “What's the actual impact on the ground when it's carried out?”. Similarly, in the inquiry into the financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship, the evidence from women with lived experience helped committee members to challenge the formal evidence that they heard from ‘formal’ witnesses during public sessions:

“ So we knew to go back and test the evidence that we had heard from the so-called experts [it] was actually really helpful because they [people with lived experience] were able to say it doesn't happen. Or it that might be the theory, but in practise, this is what happens.”

Committee member

## Direct from an individual

An overwhelming majority of interviewees, both committee members and Parliament staff members, highlighted the distinctive power of hearing directly from an individual. This was valued over and above other sources of lived experience – both in written form within calls for views, and via third sector or representative organisations. The follow excerpts from interviewees highlight this:

“ [hearing directly] I think is always better than hearing it second hand...to me it gives greater weight than a third party saying “Jeanie shared this”. I think it's much more powerful to hear from Jeanie.”

Committee member

“ [T]hey've (third sector organisations) often done their own lived experience engagement as well, but they're just, [Committee] members are not going to take the same from a professional employed person as they are from an individual telling their story.”

Parliament staff member

“ I mean, the same information may be in participatory, brilliant research. It might all be there if you have the academic there presenting it to committee but it's not going to have the same impact. What [Committee] members really remember is talking to an individual who's speaking about their own experience, and that is just so powerful.”

Parliament staff member

Reflecting on a specific interaction, one committee member stated:

“ So that was really useful, I think been able to hear first hand about some of the stigma that persists in society was helpful to me. Access to services, someone's just been really honest about here's where it works for me. And here's where it doesn't work for me and kind of like also “here's what the government's getting right. And here's what the government still not getting right.” And again, it was unvarnished because it was someone's own experience.”

Committee member

Some of the reasons why hearing directly from people was more useful and impactful are alluded to in the above excerpts. It gives more “weight” to be able to see and hear the person who is sharing their experience, and there is a sense that it is the “honest” and “unvarnished” experience. For some, this was understood as a contrast with people who attend formal evidence sessions to give evidence from organisational perspectives:

“ there's a lot of organisations speaking on behalf of people who are not necessarily reflective of some of some of the lived experience on the ground. So that's the difficulty with it. So they're speaking from an organisational perspective.”

Committee Member

When considering the relative value of hearing directly from people with lived experience compared to drawing on, for example, existing qualitative and/or participatory research, interviewees noted that this cannot speak directly to the policy or bill in front of the committee. For the purposes of scrutiny, it is vital to be able to have a dialogue with people to probe and explore experiences and views in relation to the *specifics* of a bill or policy. This is not something that can be achieved by using secondary data.

Another reason highlighted by one of the committee members interviewed was that using a variety of formats supports better engagement:

“ [C]oming at things in different formats, so somebody coming and talking to me about something, is potentially more powerful or more useful. Things land more clearly than actually sitting, reading lots and lots and lots of information.”

Committee member

The members of the Scottish Women's Aid Survivors Reference Group (SRG) who participated in the inquiry into the financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship ([see case study for full details](#)) also highlighted the importance of hearing directly from individuals:

“ [T]hey need to hear what we're saying rather than just have it disseminated in a report, you know, because I think there's a lot to be said from actually looking at someone's face and listening to the words they're saying rather than me writing something down.”

Participant from informal engagement session

This view was echoed by all of the SRG members who took part in the focus group that followed their engagement with the Social Security and Social Justice Committee. Although this is only reflective of one of the many processes of engagement that the Scottish Parliament undertakes, it is worth noting that despite the difficult and personal issues that were discussed, SRG members were positive about their overall experience.

## Outputs from lived experience engagement processes

The powerful and insightful views that lived experience offers, as recounted in the previous section, are most often captured through some form of note for the purposes of public reporting. In some cases, there are no notes produced and there can be good reasons for this, namely, to ensure confidentiality and safety for those taking part. As highlighted previously, this was the case for an engagement session that took place as part of an inquiry into HIV treatment and awareness in Scotland.

For some people to be able to speak openly, it might be that PACT has worked with organisations and agreed that the only way for someone to take part would be for there to be no public note. In other cases, it might be too difficult, due to the specific nature of the topic, to be able to adequately anonymise the contributions.

Other processes have been managed in a very different way. For example, during Stage 1 scrutiny of the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, the Criminal Justice Committee heard from women with lived experience of sexual crime and the criminal justice system. The decision was taken for the meeting to be fully transcribed and, with names and identifying information removed, made public. This decision was made in close collaboration with Rape Crisis Scotland, who helped to facilitate the engagement and worked directly with the participants themselves.

These are two examples from either end of a spectrum, however, the most common practice is somewhere in between. In most cases, members of the committee support team (i.e. Clerks and members of SPICe and PACT) will be responsible for taking notes, capturing the key issues raised, whilst ensuring participant anonymity. The participants involved get the chance to review and amend the note before it is made public so that they can be sure they are satisfied with how their views have been represented, and that they are not identifiable. These notes become the 'data' that clerks draw on during the report writing process, alongside responses to calls for views, Official Reports of public meetings, and relevant correspondence received by the committee.

The power and emotion that was highly valued in the context of hearing from those with lived experience is difficult to identify within the notes that are generated. [As highlighted in research by a previous SPICe Academic Fellow Dr Cara Broadley](#), "Traditional evidence capture methods, however, often miss the full richness and nuance of participant perspectives" (p. 63). This then translates into the ways that lived experience is represented within public facing reports, as illustrated below.

One of the lines of inquiry within the interviews was around the way that the insights from engagement with people with lived experience was used within inquiry and Stage 1 reports. Given the quantity of evidence that is generated and used over the course of an inquiry, or as a bill makes its way through the various stages of scrutiny, it is important to understand the relationship between different forms and sources of information and how they are represented. Examining the representation of lived experience within public documents is one route into understanding the function and value of this form of evidence. It is also the outward facing account of lived experience for the public and can be accessed by those who have participated.

When talking this through, one Parliament staff member said:

“ So [lived experience], it's there, it's in the mix. It's not necessarily always the single most important thing, but it's certainly is a major a major factor and it'll back up things that you hear in the call for views and that the main stakeholder groups are saying.”

Parliament staff member

Another member of staff reflected on the level of prominence given to lived experience in a committee report, noting that it was not always drawn on explicitly or extensively, nevertheless:

“ that's not to say that that [lived experience] evidence doesn't have value because it's not forming the majority of the report. The majority of the report will be informed from the formal evidence sessions, but on each of the topics that has probably come up during formal evidence, there'll be an informal element to too. We'll have heard about their view on a particular we'll put in that evidence that at that stage [of the report].”

Parliament staff member

The extent to which lived experience features within public facing documents is key to tracing impact as well as keeping track of knowledge and good practice in this space.

## Complexities and challenges

As the use of lived experience increases across parliamentary committees, it is important to reflect on some of the complexities and challenges and how an understanding and recognition of challenges can inform best practice. Many of the interviewees reflected thoughtfully on the ways that evidence from people with lived experience was generated and incorporated into parliamentary systems. The following sections highlight some of the issues raised, before turning to some of the recommendations for practice improvements that were identified across the interviews.

### Who has 'lived experience'?

The consensus was that lived experience was broadly defined to mean people with experience of the issue that is the focus of the inquiry, bill or policy under scrutiny. However, interesting complexities arose over the course of interviews as committee members and Parliament staff members started to unpack some of the assumptions that underlie the label of 'lived experience' and the application of that label to some groups and not to others.

One Parliament staff member put this succinctly, “[W]e're all alive and we all have experience” before going on to explain further:

“ Even you know, professional witnesses often come to their roles like because they have had lived experience. But I think in the minds of members they will separate that out. Then if we go and find, I don't know, like a group of survivors or something like that, they will see that as like pure lived experience.”

Parliament staff member

Here the Parliament staff member is commenting on the ways that lived experience is applied to specific groups of people, and not others. A committee member also noted this, highlighting that:

“ I think of lived experience, inevitably my mind goes to people who are downtrodden, finding it difficult, who the system is against. Rather than seeing actually lived experience as lived experience. You know, I've lived experience of X&Y.”

Committee member

The same committee member went on to suggest that there needed to be further clarity when using the term lived experience so that it is clear *what* the experience was, and why one type of lived experience or perspective was sought over another. Focusing specifically on [the Inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship](#), the committee member asked the following question:

“ we wanted to focus on people who were women who were running away from domestic abuse, and that was, but we didn't go and ask the lawyers, for their lived experience. We didn't ask the average family lawyer in Edinburgh “What's it like?”, you know?”

Committee member

The interviewee was not necessarily advocating for including lawyers within the inquiry, and indeed highlighted that they had heard directly from the Scottish Legal Aid Board. Rather, they were illustrating some of the complexities and challenges of using the term ‘lived experience’ without clear definition. In a similar vein, another committee member noted that:

“ So actually, you could have you could have lived experience of the end user, but you could also have lived experience of the local authority that needs to carry out whatever it is [within a Bill].”

Committee member

This is reflected across the documentary analysis of Official Reports which show that service providers also have lived experience of many of the issues of interest to committees – lived experience of using legislation and delivering the services which are often the focus of bills, policies and inquiries, but the label of lived experience is not used to characterise these inputs. These questions relate to broader concerns about who is invited to input into committee processes, and the types of knowledge and perspectives that they contribute.

## Ethical considerations

### Practical

The committee support teams, in particular PACT which leads on facilitating engagement, work hard to put into place processes that give due consideration to safeguarding, trauma-informed approaches and support for those who participate in engagement processes with committees. Working collaboratively with third sector organisations is a key part of this ([the Scottish Women's Aid collaboration is a good example of this](#)).

PACT staff are experienced facilitators who work with SPICe and Clerks to prepare committee members for engagement sessions and visits. Practical steps are taken, for example, to ensure that there are breakout spaces for those who want to take time to themselves before, after or during sessions. Facilitation training and volunteer opportunities have been made available to clerking and research staff to build broader

facilitation capacity within the organisation.

In order to support those invited to participate in engagement, lived experience and deliberative activities, there is a '[Payment for participation policy](#)', which was developed by PACT, agreed by both [the Conveners Group](#) and [the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body](#), and came into force on 1 April 2024. This sets out the principles and practice of paying people with lived experience for the time and insights they are offering to the Parliament. It notes that "some people may be unable to give up their time for free, but may be able to participate if they are compensated". It states that that this is one of the ways to ensure that "the Parliament hears from people with a range of lived experience when engaging with the public". This approach is in line with best practice from across research (see, for example [National Institute for Health Research guidelines](#)) and the third sector (see, for example, [The Poverty Alliance](#)).

More recently there has been a working group on trauma informed clerking, which included members of PACT and SPICe. This group has produced a set of principles to support clerks to work in a trauma-informed way when taking evidence from people with lived experience. There is ongoing work to embed this in the way that committees work with lived experience. The group has also produced a case study using the work of the Criminal Justice Committee on the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, in which the Committee held an engagement session with survivors of sexual crime with experience of the criminal justice system. This is the first in a series of case studies which will illustrate some of the principles of trauma-informed working in practice.

This shows that there is clearly good practice in place to support people with lived experience to engage with the Parliament and plans to build upon this.

## **Fundamental**

Beyond the practical considerations described, there were other more fundamental ethical considerations raised by interviewees that may require ongoing attention, some of which are reflected in the recommendations in the final section of this report and in the lessons learned from case studies.

The management of expectations, for instance, was a key ethical consideration and ongoing question for many of the people interviewed. Given the well-documented challenges of measuring and assessing the impact of committee scrutiny more generally, as noted by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee in its [report on Committee Effectiveness](#), it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of Parliament staff members and Committee members highlighted this as a key issue. It is difficult to be able to state definitively what change will occur as a result of someone participating in lived experience processes with committees. This also makes it difficult to be able to go back to participants to 'close the feedback loop' after the process is complete.

In relation to inquiries specifically (as opposed to Bill scrutiny) one member said:

“ I mean I do worry that we take up a lot of people's times with the expectation that it will change things and the reality is, in regards to these type of reports, I think it highlights issues and it brings them to the fore to some extent, but I'm not convinced in my own mind it changes, it has a dramatic change in government policy. And I think there is a bit of a danger that we lead people up a road or up a hill and they think to themselves, you know, I'm going to change the way that Scottish Government does something.”

Committee member

More generally, there was a concern about confusion between the roles of Government and Parliament, and the limits of the power of Parliament, and specially the impact that committees can have:

“ [F]rom a lived experience perspective [the challenge] is managing expectations of people who become involved with the parliament. So, there's quite a lot of confusion around what the Government does and what the Parliament does. It's very common that we'll encounter that, if we have engagement and we have groups that become involved with all with us that they think there's going be like some very specific outcome.”

Parliament staff member

“ [T]here can be certain expectation that something might happen as a result of them telling their stories to a politician that ultimately might just not be in their gift to do anything about.”

Committee member

In relation to these issues, there are examples of good practice in [the case study on the inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship](#). Members of the participant group were very positive about the way that this challenge had been managed. It's worth noting that in its recommendations on Strengthening Committee Effectiveness, the SPPA Committee saw that “airing lived experience” could in itself be a positive impact of an inquiry process, and “just as important as a recommendation being accepted.”

There were also ethical considerations raised in some of the interviews about the very act of inviting people to share their (often traumatic) lived experiences. One Parliament staff member described cases where an issue impacts a relatively small proportion of the population, and people might have already participated in numerous forms of consultations and engagement:

“ By the time someone gets to us in Parliament, they might have already engaged with the Scottish Government consultation process. Yes. And I just, I think you have to have very good reason to ask someone to maybe share, quite potentially traumatic experience again, when that information might already be out there.”

Parliament staff member

A committee member also had some challenging reflections about the ethics of bringing people with lived experience into Parliament:

“ I'm really aware of the fact that there's also, there can be an exploitative nature to it. And there can be a felling sometime of repeatedly telling your story from that lived experience perspective and never seeing any concrete evidence that it's actually been listened to or acted upon. There seems to be this kind of trading in currency of lived experience that I'm starting to get a bit concerned about, still firmly rooted and the fact that we cannot create good policy, unless we actually understand what the lived experience is, it would be directly affected by it.”

Committee Member

In both cases the interviewees were broadly supportive of processes that bring people with lived experience into the scrutiny work of the committees. They both saw a key role for this type of input, but highlighted some very important questions that they saw as being fundamental to the way that this type of work is developed going forward.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Conclusions drawn from interviews

All the interviewees were asked to think about what was needed in order to most ethically and effectively bring lived experience into the work of committees, and what recommendations they had for developing this work into the next Parliamentary session (2026-2031). There were a wide variety of different suggestions that incorporated practical and relatively straightforward recommendations which, subject to resources being available, could be implemented quickly and easily. Others were more complex in terms of requiring a more fundamental shift in how some parts of the Parliament, and individuals within it, work and value lived experience.

The Scottish Parliament has shown a strong commitment to involving lived experience in scrutiny. This is clear in the work done by SPICe, PACT and clerks to support committees, and the evidence gathered through this project. It has also been expressed and supported more formally at a political level by the Parliament through the Blueprint for participation, and the findings of the Committee Effectiveness inquiry.

However, it was clear from interviewees that they felt that more needs to be done to ensure that lived experience is genuinely valued and well-supported in scrutiny processes. There were a number of recommendations that suggested the continuation of some ways of working, highlighting the good practice that exists, along with recommendations for carrying progress on this work further.

## Key themes and recommendations

The following sections summarise four key themes alongside references from interviews with Parliament staff members, committee members and individuals involved as participants of a lived experience panel to support the Social Justice and Social Security Committee's Inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship.

### 1. Valuing lived experience as a valid form of evidence

Whilst the report has highlighted the specific value that lived experience can have within scrutiny processes, the description of it as 'informal' in comparison to the 'formal' evidence given in public can risk it being viewed as an "optional extra" as described by one committee member, and attendance at sessions as "voluntary" as described by a Parliament staff member. This requires a shift in ways of working so that the different forms of evidence are put on an equal weighting in terms of how they are prioritised by committees and represented in public facing outputs. Leadership from the top i.e., from the Presiding Officer and the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body was seen as vital to give focus and direction, rather than relying on individuals or small groups of people driving this work forward.

### 2. Development of training and capacity building opportunities

Almost all interviewees mentioned the need for training and capacity building in some

form. It was felt that both Committee members and Parliament staff members require trauma-informed training and one committee member made specific reference to human-rights based approaches too. Given the role that committee members play in facilitating many engagement activities, it was highlighted that specific facilitation training should be provided.

Those who had been involved in the Inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship as lived experience participants acknowledged the empathy and respect that they had been shown by the committee members they had met, and highlighted that this is something that should be standard. They recommended robust training that included case studies, real life narratives and practical skills for sensitive questioning and listening. Interviewees also highlighted the practical considerations of training, ensuring that it is accessible, and a mix of online resources “that you can have on your phone [...] so that when you're commuting you can watch a video” (Committee member) and in person training as part of induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for MSPs.

The SPPA Committee, in [its recommendations on Committee Effectiveness](#), gave support to an induction programme open to all committee members at the start of Session 7 (in 2026), which would present an ideal opportunity to begin this work.

### **3. Ongoing considerations of ethical and emotional safety**

Continued use of emotional support structures in terms of breakout spaces, debriefs and ongoing engagement with third sector organisations were seen as essential. Newly developed training resources and guidance on trauma informed approaches are a welcome development in this area. There were also recommendations to be aware of the potential for vicarious trauma for committee members and staff engaging with people with lived experience of trauma.

Some more fundamental questions related to ethics were also raised by interviewees, as highlighted in the previous ‘complexities and challenges’ section. Some queried the extent of requests for lived experience in committees, and the ethics of doing so. The use of some of the principles for use of deliberative democracy, as set out by Dr Ruth Lightbody in her [Fellowship work supporting the development of the Blueprint for participation](#), could be beneficial here. Key considerations are about the proportionate and relevant use of lived experience, asking critical questions about *why* lived experience is being sought, the purpose of the engagement, and the extent to which the direct input of people with lived experience is the only way to get this information. This is contingent on more time being taken at the outset of inquiries and bill scrutiny, which is also in line with some of the recommendations in the SPPA's Committee Effectiveness report.

### **4. Early collaborative planning of lived experience engagements**

Committee members and Parliament staff members recommended a more collaborative approach to planning lived experience engagement. There is already extensive collaboration between PACT, SPICe, and clerks, and with the third sector organisations, therefore recommendations focused on collaboration earlier on in the planning process and with more active involvement of committee members. One Parliament staff member reflected that “[Committee members] are not part of the planning [...] they're quite passive

in the whole thing” and that it would be valuable to explore a change in approach in Session 7. This set of recommendations align with the tools and approaches for planning scrutiny processes that are proposed in [Dr Cara Broadley's Fellowship research](#), as well as the recommendations on Committee Effectiveness.

## Lessons learned from case studies

This section summarises the lessons learned from the case studies and the recommendations that come from this learning. The report then presents an overall summary and some next steps. The full case studies are available in a separate report.

### Financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship

Managing the expectations of participants was crucial throughout this process. Staff worked in collaboration with Scottish Women's Aid to design a process which explicitly addressed previous negative experiences of participants and built in mechanisms for feedback and reflection. Participants appreciated openness and honesty across the process, even when Committee members were stating the limits of their power and scope for change.

‘Book-ending’ the formal evidence with engagement with the members of the participant group added extra dimension to scrutiny and giving participants more meaningful engagement across the whole process. This approach also clearly illustrated two of the potential roles that insights from people with lived experience can play in committee processes: 1) set the context and guide subsequent formal evidence 2) challenge, feedback and provide an alternative perspective to formal evidence.

### Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill

The examples of the experiences of committee members involved in this process illustrated the importance of new perspectives in the scrutiny process. Committee members demonstrated a commitment to hearing from and, crucially, learning from people who have lived experience. Encouraging, supporting and giving committee members the skills to approach scrutiny in this way is crucial.

The Right to Addiction Recovery case study also underscores the need for committee support teams to work closely with members to identify gaps in understanding and ensure a diversity of voices is represented. This requires a commitment to broadening engagement beyond established networks, as demonstrated in PACT's “Approach to Working with Communities”. This sets out a 12-month plan that commits to:

“ proactively scoping and researching excluded and marginalised communities, identifying missing voices, (whether by geography, identity or shared interest), building relationships and establishing new connections.”

[Participation and Communities Team: Approach to working with communities](#)

## Housing (Scotland) Bill

The two sets of recommendations of the lived experience panels on the Housing (Scotland) Bill, one involving tenants and one involving landlords, were very different in some significant ways. It is not clear how the differences were managed. In cases such as this, where opinions are divided, committee clerks commit to providing a balance of evidence when drafting reports, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the committee to consider what weight to give different forms and sources of evidence.

This case study also illustrates the complexities of integrating conflicting perspectives, especially in politically charged policy areas. This opens up the potential for alternative process that take a more deliberative approach. Whilst the People's Panels model of deliberation used by the Parliament would not necessarily have been an appropriate model here, there are smaller scale "soft deliberative" processes that would be an option.

## Common themes across case studies

Whilst all three cases used different specific processes there are some lessons and reflections that are common across all three. One recurring challenge was balancing the needs of participants with the constraints of parliamentary timelines and committee workloads. The session organised for [the Right to Addiction Recovery \(Scotland\) Bill Stage 1 scrutiny](#) was held during committee time which improved the attendance of committee members but risked excluding participants. This trade-off highlights the ongoing challenge of designing engagement processes that are both accessible to participants and feasible for committee members. In the [inquiry into the Financial Considerations when Leaving an Abusive Relationship](#), the scope and remit of the engagement had to be considered in relation to timing and resources.

The second common theme across the case studies was the challenge of evidencing the influence and impact of lived experience on the scrutiny process. While lived experience clearly shaped committee thinking, as evidenced across the interviews, the extent of this was not always clear in publicly available documents such as Official Reports, Stage 1 reports and inquiry reports. The long timelines and, in the case of [the Housing \(Scotland\) Bill](#), the volume of amendments can also make it difficult to draw direct lines between a session of engagement with people with lived experience and decisions made by members when making and voting on amendments.

## Summary and practice proposals

There is clearly a wealth of expertise around the most effective and ethical ways to support people with lived experience to engage with scrutiny processes within the Parliament, and a significant level of political buy-in at an institutional level. The individuals involved in the interviews were thoughtful and considered, emphasising the power and significance of having lived experience as part of the scrutiny processes whilst also critically reflecting on some of the challenges involved.

However, this may be a partial picture of practice, particularly given that those who participated in the research were self-selecting. It is important to recognise that there may be individuals who do not view lived experience in the ways set out in the report and case

studies. Indeed, there were comments throughout the interviews about the challenges of making sure that MSPs attended sessions with people with lived experience. Some of the challenge relates to the pressures on time, [as raised in the SPPA's Committee Effectiveness work](#), but it would be naïve to imagine that there was not some type of prioritisation that takes place when choosing how to use MSP's limited time. Therefore, it is probable that for some, engagement with people with lived experience (specifically outside of committee time) is not a priority.

Given the political buy-in and public displays of institutional support for new modes of working it is crucial that the Parliament builds on this in proactive and positive ways. This mitigates against the risk that lived experience, and participation more broadly, could become tokenistic and could damage relationships and trust between people and the Parliament.

## Recommended practice approach

In addition to the recommendations on principles for practice made by [Dr Cara Broadley](#) and [Dr Ruth Lightbody](#) in their fellowship projects, there are some fundamental questions which committees and their support staff should be asking themselves when considering the use of lived experience. In line with the more [detailed planning and scoping process envisioned by the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in its recommendations on Strengthening Committee Effectiveness](#), **the following questions should be carefully considered before any decisions are taken about the specific design and format of engagement processes:**

1. What gap or question do you want lived experience to address in the specific context of this scrutiny process?
2. Can this insight be sought from other sources – including from previous engagement processes?
3. Is it fair to ask someone to tell share their experience again? How will they benefit? What safeguarding measures will be put in place?
4. Who do you want to hear from, and why are these the best people to invite?
5. What perspectives are missing and why?
6. How will you navigate a situation where there are significantly opposed perspectives from those with lived experience?
7. What are the power dynamics between the different people/groups you want to involve? How will these be managed?
8. What is the best way to publicly document the interaction(s) between the Committee and people with lived experience, including the specifics of the process undertaken and the ways the evidence is used in the committee report?
9. How can you be transparent about the ways that what you hear from people with lived experience influences the work of the Committee?
10. How will the impact of the use of lived experience in scrutiny activity be monitored and communicated?

11. How will space be made for the Committee, and the participants, to reflect on the approach taken and its impact?
12. How will you update and feedback to those who share their lived experience with the Committee?

These questions may lead to some uncomfortable answers and some difficult discussions. Perhaps there are times when the answer is that it is not fair to ask someone to retell a traumatic experience because the range of potential outcomes are not sufficiently beneficial to the individuals involved.

There are also groups that are at risk of over-consultation and participation. Groups with lived experience of specific circumstances that only effect a small section of the population can be at risk of this. For example, Gypsy/Travellers, care-experienced people, island residents and kinship carers all have specific lived experience that is often sought across a range of processes and institutions, including the Parliament. Returning to these groups, particularly if their circumstances have not significantly changed as a result of previous engagement, can be damaging to relationships as well as for the individuals involved.

Given the nature of the Parliament and the intention for it to be open, transparent and democratic, it is also difficult to have to say that perhaps there are different or better sources of information than hearing directly from individuals. Nevertheless, committees and the committee support teams must engage with these discussions in order to be clear about exactly what they are asking and why. Sharing publicly the rationale behind the use of lived experience processes and the steps taken to mitigate any risks to the individuals involved would further strengthen the transparency and legitimacy of the process.

When people with lived experience are invited to share their personal perspectives with committees there is a risk that, if not done well, it is a resource intensive process which risks re-traumatising marginalised people with very little or no discernible impact on scrutiny. However, this research has highlighted that there is powerful potential for lived experience, with good practice, to strengthen scrutiny within the Parliament.

To deliver this potential and build on previous successes, the Scottish Parliament must consider the recommendations within this report, alongside findings from previous academic fellows' research and the SPPA Committee's inquiry into Strengthening Committee Effectiveness. As preparations are underway for the next Parliamentary session, the lessons and recommendations from this body of work offer a valuable foundation for more inclusive, effective and ethical processes of scrutiny.

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