

# Public Audit Committee

## 9th Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Thursday, 25 November

### Community empowerment: Covid-19 update

#### Introduction

1. At its meeting today, the Public Audit Committee will take evidence in a roundtable format from witnesses on the joint Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission [Community empowerment: Covid-19 update](#), which was published on 28 October 2021.
2. Those attending are—
  - Audit Scotland – Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland
  - Carnegie UK Trust – Pippa Coutts, Policy and Development Manager
  - Collydean Community Centre – Ryan Smart, Centre Manager
  - Scottish Centre for Voluntary Organisations – Anna Fowlie, Chief Executive
  - Scottish Community Development Centre – David Allan, Deputy Director
  - SURF- Scotland’s Regeneration Forum – Euan Leitch, Chief Executive
3. The key themes for discussion for the session today are as follows—
  - Key factors for what worked well during the pandemic - 30 mins (approx.)
  - Risks around losing good practice/ going back to old ways of working - 30 mins (approx.)
  - Strengthening community empowerment across the public sector - 20 mins (approx.)
4. Audit Scotland has prepared a briefing paper which provides background information on each of the key themes for discussion, along with suggested questions to help structure the discussion. This can be found at **Annexe A**.
5. A copy of the Community empowerment: Covid-19 update, can be found at **Annexe B**.

**Clerks to the Committee**  
**22 November 2021**

## BRIEFING FROM AUDIT SCOTLAND

### COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: COVID-19 UPDATE

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1. The joint Auditor General and Accounts Commission [Community empowerment: Covid-19 update](#) was published on 28 October 2021.
2. This paper summarises the main issues participants may wish to consider further at the roundtable session on 25 November 2021. The proposed issues for discussion relate to three main areas, primarily:
  - Key factors for what worked well during the pandemic
  - Risks around losing good practice/ going back to old ways of working
  - Strengthening community empowerment across the public sector
3. For each area, we give background information from the Auditor General and Accounts Commission joint update and areas which participants may wish to explore.
4. The contributors to the roundtable are as follows:
  - [The Auditor General for Scotland](#)
  - [Scottish Community Development Centre](#)
  - [SURF](#) – Scotland's Regeneration Forum
  - [Scottish Centre for Voluntary Organisations](#)
  - [Carnegie UK Trust](#)
  - [Collydean Community Centre](#)

## A. Key factors for what worked well during the pandemic

5. During the pandemic, local people and communities across Scotland played a critical role in supporting the most vulnerable people in society. Partnerships and the voluntary sector were vital in supporting and empowering people to do this. In areas where existing relationships were stronger, some communities were able to provide a faster and more targeted response, for example in North Ayrshire. This enabled rapid allocation of funding to well-established organisations supporting those most affected by Covid-19, including some of the funding packages announced by the Scottish Government for supporting communities.
  
6. Key themes and learning from the pandemic are summarised against the five principles for community empowerment (Community control, Public sector leadership, Effective relationships, Improving outcomes, and Accountability). Some of the main points included: swift responses based on communities understanding local needs, using technology to do things differently, flexibility of community organisations, public bodies supporting community leadership and working collaboratively, partners trusting each other to do what they do best with a sense of purpose, rapid redesign or repurposing activities to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable, and the ability to do things differently with less red tape and bureaucracy.
  
7. *Participants may wish to explore:*
  - Q 1. *The factors underpinning successful approaches and how these differed from pre-pandemic circumstances*
  
  - Q 2. *Ways in which feedback was obtained from communities and examples of how public bodies put citizens at the heart of their work*
  
  - Q 3. *Ways learning is being captured, evaluated, and shared, both locally and nationally, and how this is being used*
  
  - Q 4. *Evaluation and the approaches being used to measure improving outcomes*
  
  - Q 5. *The extent to which new ways of working are being sustained, and enablers and barriers*

## **B. Risks around losing good practice/ going back to old ways of working**

8. There has been a varied response across Scotland and there is a risk of going back to old ways of working and losing improved and more efficient ways of working which have developed during the pandemic. There are risks in implementing new approaches but being measured, exploiting opportunities, and learning from unsuccessful approaches will bring innovation. Greater collaboration – across the public and third sectors, and with communities – will be vital to the recovery and support transformation of public services. It will also be important to review and consult on temporary changes brought in through powers granted by Coronavirus Acts.
9. Public bodies should be actively looking for feedback from communities and the third sector on how they worked together during the pandemic and how they can learn from it. Community organisations have a key role to play in supporting the public sector, strengthening links between services and communities, and building resilience. Public bodies should not underestimate the importance of the voice and experience of citizens, talking and listening to communities, being open and transparent, and continuing to develop strong relationships and partnerships. This will require strong leadership and a change in culture.
10. *Participants may wish to explore:*

- Q 6. *The extent to which public bodies are embedding new approaches to community engagement in delivering public services*
- Q 7. *The barriers to implementing new approaches and taking risks*
- Q 8. *Whether public bodies are actively seeking feedback from communities on the learning from the pandemic, and how this is being done*
- Q 9. *Whether public bodies are consulting on temporary changes brought in during the pandemic*

## **C. Strengthening community empowerment across the public sector**

11. There are still challenges around inequalities and poorer outcomes for the most vulnerable and for disadvantaged groups of society, such as those on low incomes, ethnic minorities, people without digital access, carers and people with disabilities and care needs. Public bodies can learn from good practice and new

ways of working which emerged in response to Covid-19 and use this to shape the way they work in the future to promote the best outcomes for local communities and help address inequalities. Public bodies should use this information alongside their own learning to develop longer-term approaches to supporting and empowering communities.

12. *Participants may wish to explore:*

- Q 10. *The extent to which public bodies across all parts of the public sector are supporting and empowering communities*
- Q 11. *The Scottish Government's role in supporting public bodies to strengthen their approaches*
- Q 12. *Public audit's role in supporting improvement in community empowerment and areas where work could focus*

## Update report

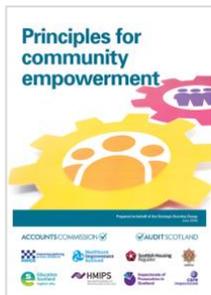
# Communities played a crucial role in the response to Covid-19

28 October 2021 by Auditor General and Accounts Commission

View online: [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/community-empowerment-covid-19-update](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/community-empowerment-covid-19-update)

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## Purpose of this output



1. Public bodies can learn from good practice and new ways of working which emerged in response to Covid-19 and use this to shape the way they work in the future to promote the best outcomes for local communities and help address inequalities. On this page we share some of the many good examples of the community response to the pandemic and summarise the learning. It builds on the [Principles for community empowerment](#) published in 2019 and ongoing engagement with the Community Empowerment Advisory Group. Public bodies should use this information alongside their own learning to develop longer-term approaches to supporting and empowering communities.

## Update report

2. Covid-19 has [disproportionately affected](#) Scotland's most vulnerable citizens. During the pandemic, local people and communities across Scotland played a critical role in supporting the most vulnerable people in society. [Partnerships](#) and the [voluntary sector](#) were vital in supporting and empowering people to do this. In areas where [existing relationships were stronger](#), some communities were able to provide a faster and more targeted response, for example in [North Ayrshire](#). This enabled rapid allocation of funding to well-established organisations supporting those most affected by Covid-19, including some of the funding packages [announced by the Scottish Government](#) in March 2020 for supporting communities.

3. For example, Highlands and Islands Enterprise administered Covid-19 support for communities and the third sector and there are many examples of how this was used by [communities pulling together to help local residents](#). The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) [website](#) was the main hub of information and support for communities and the third sector during the pandemic, updated regularly with new funds from both government and independent sources, and ongoing recovery funding.

## Key learning from the pandemic linked to the Principles for community empowerment

Principle	Key themes/ learning points during Covid-19	What do public bodies need to think about as we start to recover?
<p><b>1. Community control</b></p>  <p>Support communities to successfully take more control over decisions and assets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swift community responses based on understanding local needs</li> <li>• Communities leading initiatives with quicker access to funding streams</li> <li>• Using technology to do things differently while recognising the need to include those people who are digitally excluded</li> <li>• Versatility of community organisations, aware of local issues with person-centred approaches and a 'can-do' ethos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design flexible governance and decision-making processes best suited to the communities they serve</li> <li>• More local decision-making structures with active local participation and shared power to allow decisions to be taken that matter locally</li> <li>• Reduce the digital divide and continue to learn from and improve digital engagement with communities</li> <li>• Provide a range of support and investment to communities to sustain new approaches and continue existing good practice</li> </ul>

Principle	Key themes/ learning points during Covid-19	What do public bodies need to think about as we start to recover?
<p data-bbox="125 316 600 357"><b>2. Public sector leadership</b></p>  <p data-bbox="300 379 658 560">Strong and clear leadership on community empowerment sets the tone and culture of the organisation</p>	<ul data-bbox="712 316 1352 616" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public bodies providing the resources for communities to lead initiatives – for example funding, sharing information, assets – and the conditions for community groups to flourish</li> <li>• Public bodies recognising and supporting community leadership and working collaboratively</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="1397 316 2107 794" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise the value that the third sector and communities bring and trust those groups best placed to take the lead</li> <li>• Support the third sector and local communities to participate, considering the need for capacity building, sharing resources and knowledge</li> <li>• Improve funding arrangements including simpler access and promoting longer-term sustainability</li> <li>• More working directly with communities to develop and implement ideas for improvement</li> <li>• Develop a shared vision with partners</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="125 879 546 920"><b>3. Effective relationship</b></p>  <p data-bbox="300 943 636 1123">Build effective working relationships between public bodies, local communities, and local partners</p>	<ul data-bbox="712 879 1352 1267" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners trusting each other to do what they do best with a shared sense of purpose</li> <li>• Utilising the strengths of existing partnerships including community planning partnerships – drawing on local knowledge and connections</li> <li>• Mobilising and supporting lots of volunteers and groups, including providing advice, guidance and training</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="1397 879 2107 1273" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being aware of emerging groups and partnerships, nourishing, supporting and sustaining these</li> <li>• Foster ongoing and equal working relationships based on shared values and trust</li> <li>• Working collaboratively with the community, and listening to and understanding a broad range of views and perspectives</li> <li>• Rethink priorities and align partnership working based on own learning from the pandemic</li> </ul>

Principle	Key themes/ learning points during Covid-19	What do public bodies need to think about as we start to recover?
<p><b>4. Improving outcomes</b></p>  <p>Evaluate whether outcomes for local communities are improving and inequalities are being reduced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-designing services or re-purposing activities to meet local need and improve outcomes for the most vulnerable</li> <li>• Approaches that aim to meet a range of different needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep a focus on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities within local communities in ways that are consistent with human rights-based approaches</li> <li>• Use learning to adapt approaches, including where things have not gone well, to increase the impact of community empowerment</li> <li>• Develop skills for effective use of digital technology</li> <li>• Continue to share learning with others</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Accountability</b></p>  <p>Be accountable and transparent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility to do things differently with less red tape and bureaucracy</li> <li>• Early engagement with communities to reach shared decisions of how to respond quickly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the need to take risks and take a learning approach</li> <li>• Proportionate governance arrangements with sufficient scrutiny and oversight</li> <li>• Decisions demonstrate genuine community engagement and influence</li> <li>• Make decisions in an open and transparent way</li> </ul>

## Implementing learning from the pandemic will be key to recovery

4. There are still challenges around inequalities and poorer outcomes for the most vulnerable and for disadvantaged groups of society, such as those on low incomes, ethnic minorities, [people without digital access](#), carers and people with disabilities and care needs.
5. There has been a varied response across Scotland and there is a risk of going back to old ways of working and losing improved and more efficient ways of working which have developed during the pandemic. There are risks in implementing new approaches but being measured, exploiting opportunities, and learning from unsuccessful approaches will bring innovation. Greater collaboration – across the public and third sectors, and with communities – will be vital to the recovery. It will also be important to [review and consult on temporary changes](#) brought in through powers granted by Coronavirus Acts.
6. Public bodies should be actively looking for feedback from communities and the third sector on how they worked together during the pandemic and how they can learn from it. Community organisations have a [key role to play](#) in supporting the public sector, strengthening links between services and communities, and building resilience. Public bodies should not underestimate the importance of the voice and experience of citizens, talking and listening to communities, being open and transparent, and continuing to develop strong relationships and partnerships. Public bodies should be able to take a step back and give people permission to take control and support new collaborations or ones that work in a different way. This will require strong leadership and a change in culture.
7. Our work will continue to support the public sector to reduce inequalities, improve outcomes, protect human rights, and give citizens a say in how services are delivered. Our dynamic work programme is continually updated to reflect changing circumstances and we will be considering how public bodies are embedding community empowerment and learning and how this supports recovery following the pandemic. This includes inclusive digital approaches, climate change, economic recovery, use of community assets and community wealth building.
8. You can find all the Covid-19 related reports we have produced so far, as well as other resources, on our website [here](#).

## Some examples of learning from communities during the pandemic

### STAR project, a community project in Paisley

"Amid the horrors of this crisis, the fear and the loss, there has also been gain. New ways of working, evidence of cultural resilience, expanding comfort zones, heightened creativity, lots of compassion, and a new kind of connectedness."



- Community project which was able to be flexible and creative
- Responded to wider impacts of Covid-19 experienced in marginalised communities
- Continued to provide support by switching to digital platforms
- Built community resilience through new ways of working, expanding comfort zones, compassion, and different connections

### **The Safe Zone: Dundee City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)**

- Working with a wide range of partners, the HSCP repurposed an existing third sector service – [the Safe Zone bus](#) – which provides support to people in distress on Friday/ Saturday nights in the city centre
- While services were reduced during the pandemic, partners used the bus to deliver support to vulnerable people, including: nursing care, substance misuse services, debt and benefits advice, help with housing or homelessness issues, and also hot food and drinks and someone to chat to

### **Winter Lockdown Project, West Lothian, Perth & Kinross, and East Lothian**

- Support in Mind Scotland supporting communities to develop approaches and activities aimed at improving mental well-being and strengthening a sense of community
- Focus on countering negative effects of the pandemic, building connections, and improving health inequalities
- Taps into national resources and expertise through the National Rural Mental Health Forum and Community Health Exchange, and feeding into Public Health Scotland national research
- Empowering people to get involved in health research and improving health

## Ferguslie Park, a community response

"We were able to channel Scottish Government resources to community groups during lockdown in a fair, open and transparent way because of last year's PB process. If we hadn't run the PB process last year I don't know how we would have gone about doing that."



- Community group, previously involved in participatory budgeting (PB), came together to deliver care packages, and support the community.
- Used their experience of PB to direct funding in a fair, open, and transparent way
- Organic approach with informal groups taking the lead in supporting people in creative ways and finding alternative funding streams

### **Barrhead Housing Association, a community anchor response**

- A housing association, well established in the community, co-ordinated with key partners to identify people needing support, minimise duplication of services and maximise resources available
- Directed Scottish Government Supporting Communities Fund to several community support agencies to enable a quick response to challenges from Covid-19, including those shielding, people with Alzheimer's, people with learning difficulties, providing IT equipment, and financial advice and support

### **Lochalsh Community Response**

- Strong local partnership, led by Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust
- Having an effective place-based partnership in existence helped establish a strong cross-community response to the pandemic
- Worked with a local councillor to help ensure the local voluntary effort could be linked to wider support from public services

## Alva Development Trust



"Partnership has improved recently. Everybody seems to be saying we're here for same reason. It's been fantastic. The council has been only a phone call away. They put you through to the right person. We didn't have the same kind of relationship before."

- Alva Development Trust, established in 2018 to run the community hall following a community asset transfer, secured funding and adapted its services to support people across a wide area
- Reported improved partnership working and a transformation in relationships with the community, mobilising lots of volunteers



### **Renfrewshire Neighbourhood Hubs**

- Established seven community hubs, aligning with the Local Partnerships already in place, run in partnership by the council, HSCP and the third sector
- The hubs were set up to support people's wellbeing, recognising a gap in support to people not on shielding lists and facing different challenges
- Engage Renfrewshire, the third sector interface, acted as a conduit for links to other third sector and community organisations

### **Argyll and Bute Council Supporting Local Networking**

- Council's role in bringing community organisations together, helping to share ideas and co-ordinate the community response
- Created the conditions for community and voluntary organisations to work, learn and grow together
- Supported community groups to operate and access funding during the pandemic, and is using feedback on how effective this was to continue to improve

## Collydean Community Centre, Glenrothes



- Quickly adapted community centre services and activities to provide a range of support
- Focused on supporting most vulnerable (people made redundant during pandemic, isolated people)
- Helped equip people with skills that can continue to be of benefit post-pandemic
- Working in partnership with Women's Aid to support increased referrals for domestic abuse



## Links to further information

- [Wellbeing Fund: analysis of awards](#)  
Scottish Government, November 2020
- [Covid-19, Good Council Practice](#)  
Improvement Service
- [Covid-19: Health and Social Care Learning in Scotland](#)  
Healthcare Improvement Scotland ihub
- [Equipping-professionals: engaging-differently](#)  
Healthcare Improvement Scotland Community Engagement
- [Planning with people: Community engagement and participation guidance for NHS Boards, Integration Joint Boards and Local Authorities](#)  
Scottish Government and COSLA, March 2021
- [Community Health and Wellbeing - Sustaining and strengthening the role of community organisations beyond the initial Covid-19 response](#)  
Healthcare Improvement Scotland and NESTA, April 2021
- [Research into community response to Covid-19](#)  
Scottish Community Alliance, June 2020
- [Communities Channel Scotland](#)  
examples of communities responding to C-19, SCDC, August 2020
- [Rapid Evaluation of the Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund](#)  
SCDC, May 2020
- [Covid-19 Lessons from the frontline](#)  
SURF, August 2020
- [Covid-19 Building community resilience](#)  
SURF, September 2020
- [DTAS Member Covid Responses](#)  
Development Trust Association Scotland, March 2021
- [Social action during the coronavirus pandemic: Learning from the crisis to help build forward better](#)  
Social Action Inquiry Scotland, February 2021
- [Coronavirus and its impact on the Scottish voluntary sector](#)  
SCVO, March 2021
- [Pooling Together: How Community Hubs have responded to the Covid-19 Emergency](#)  
Carnegie UK Trust, September 2020
- [Covid-19 and Communities Listening Project: A Shared Response](#)  
Carnegie UK Trust, November 2020
- [Rethinking Scotland: Take action to include more voices in policy-making in Scotland](#)  
Carnegie UK Trust, July 2021
- [Manifesto for change](#)  
TSI Scotland Network, October 2020
- [Report of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland](#)  
January 2021
- [If not now, when? – Social Renewal Advisory Board report](#)  
Scottish Government, January 2021

Update report

# Communities played a crucial role in the response to Covid-19

Audit Scotland's published material is available for download on the website in a number of formats. For information on our accessibility principles, please visit:

[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/accessibility)

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