Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

11th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), 15 June 2022

Evidence Session: Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 15 June 2022 the Committee will take evidence from George Adam MSP, Minister for Parliamentary Business, on the Scottish Government's response to the report of the Working Group on Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD).

Background

2. At its meeting on 20 April 2022 the Committee took evidence from members of the Scottish Government's Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD) Working Group on their recent report. The Official Report of that session is included as Annexe A.

3. The IPDD working group was established in Summer 2021. Its objectives were to:

   - define participatory and deliberative processes, including (but not limited to) Citizens' Assemblies
   - define standards, values and principles for their use
   - set out the aims, benefits and risks of using participatory and deliberative processes
   - identify methods of governance for delivering credible and trustworthy participatory and deliberative processes
   - set out for Ministers options for their routine use
   - provide an indication of the resources necessary (both within public services and in the wider community) to establish and deliver these routinely and sustainably

The working group's report

4. On 25 March 2022, the Scottish Government published [Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (IPDD) Working Group: report](#), along with [a supporting document](#). The report was published alongside the third version of [the Open Government Action Plan](#).

5. The report sets out a range of conclusions and recommendations for "how the Scottish Government's ambition for transformative change can be delivered to make Scotland's democracy more participative and inclusive." It defines key terms and sets out what the group sees as the benefits of this approach. Annexe B provides a summary of the recommendations.

6. The supporting document "provides further information on the values, principles and standards that the IPDD Working Group recommends are collectively adopted".

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

Extract from Official Report: 20 April 2022

Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

The Convener: For item 2, we will take evidence from a Scottish Government expert group—the institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy working group, which I will refer to as the IPDD group from now on. It was established last summer and, in March this year, it published a report that set out a number of recommendations on how to

"make Scotland's democracy more participative and inclusive."

That is very relevant to the consideration that the committee is currently giving to that area as part of our remit.

I am delighted to welcome three members of the group. Kelly McBride, who is deliberative democracy lead with TPXimpact, is joining us in person. We also have Fiona Garven, who is director of the Scottish Community Development Centre, and Talat Yaqoob, who is an independent consultant and researcher, joining us online. Welcome to you all.

I understand that Kelly McBride has offered to determine who is best placed to answer each of our questions. For those of you participating virtually, if you put an R in the chat box, that will let the clerks know that you wish to come in.

We have a number of areas that we are keen to explore with the group. These follow on from our first evidence session with witnesses, who were from a broad spectrum, both internationally and here in the United Kingdom, with an expertise in this area.

We want to look at the operation of the group, the definitions that you have identified and the benefits of participatory and deliberative democracy. There is a section in the report that talks about the risks and the committee is keen to understand what the unforeseen consequences might be even of being successful in a deliberative democracy exercise. Some of the risks appear to be identified as risks that could come about if we do not succeed well enough, but there could be others too.

We also want to look at the group's vision and recommendations and the next steps, because we are looking forward to receiving the Scottish Government's response at some point, as I know you will be too.

We may also want to get some idea of the extent to which the Scottish Government left the group to do its own work and the extent to which you felt that you were getting encouraged to look at particular areas, which might then lead you to anticipate the nature of the response you might receive.

In so far as you are aware, how was the membership of the group established? Also, to what extent did the Scottish Government have any input into the thinking as it developed in the group once it was established?

Kelly McBride (TPXimpact): Good morning, everyone. As you have heard, I am deliberative democracy lead at TPXimpact. I think that it is helpful to share that my role in the working group was to facilitate the sessions. I will tell you a little bit more about those sessions in a moment.

The working group brought together a range of members from civil society, academia and research and practitioners with independent expertise and, at points, it invited some input from people representing the civil service, the Scottish Government, local government, the Scottish Parliament and indeed the secretariat of Scotland's Climate Assembly.

It was important for members of the group to hear some different perspectives, representing a broad range of people with an interest in this area and great experience and knowledge, to help us to think through some of the challenges of institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy. My other colleagues might want to give their perspectives on the range of views and experience that we had in the room in a moment, but I think that it will be helpful to give you a bit of background on how the group operated and how we came together in our meetings.

In essence, we had five facilitated workshops between July and November 2021. By "facilitated", I mean that the group came together in what I understand is a format that is not typical of a working group. We really wanted to encourage deep interrogation of ideas and for everyone to be able to share their different perspectives, so I gave great thought to the format in which those meetings were conducted, which were a series of not only small-group discussions but plenary discussions, with invited input from people representing different parts of the system that were mentioned a moment ago.

The workshops between July and November covered a series of topics. The first one looked at context setting and background. As a starting point, we thought about what participation and participatory democracy mean to us, what it means to embed participatory democracy or to use it more routinely, and where the group had come from. We learned a little bit about how the group was instigated, about some of the things that are included in the Bute house agreement and the programme for government, and about recent conversations across the sphere in Scotland.

In the second workshop, we looked at standards, values and principles. We used the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's work as a starting point to interrogate standards, values and principles, and we thought about how those would work in a Scottish context.

In the third workshop, we looked at the remit, governance and impacts. In the fourth workshop, we looked at resources and infrastructure. In the final workshop, we had a review session to look at how the report was developing.

The final thing that I will say by way of background is that we gave people opportunities to review the raw notes that were captured during all those sessions so that they could continue to provide feedback and input asynchronously—that means that they had time to reflect on what came out of the sessions and give further feedback. There were also opportunities at two points to comment on emerging draft reports and to make suggestions for amendments and edits to them. That included spotting any gaps or issues of contention. We brought back such issues to the group for discussion during the various sessions, particularly in the final review workshop.

In relation to the group's membership, I am not sure how everyone was brought into the fold, but I can say with certainty that the membership included people who have experience in the broad range of sectors and perspectives that I mentioned. People definitely brought different perspectives. There was not consensus on every point; there was discussion.

I invite my colleagues, as participants in that process, to give their reflections on their experience.

The Convener: Would Fiona Garven like to come in?

Fiona Garven (Scottish Community Development Centre): Yes. An obvious gap in the membership of the group might seem to be citizens themselves or people who have been through an assembly process—of which we have had two in Scotland—but I believe that there were some constraints in relation to delays in providing follow-up support to citizens who were involved in the Citizens Assembly of Scotland and Scotland's Climate Assembly. In future years, it will be critical to get the perspective of citizens on how the work develops in Scotland, and I think that we will achieve that as we go forward.

The Convener: Would Talat Yaqoob like to say anything on the construction of the group?

Talat Yaqoob: I just want to endorse what Fiona Garven said. It is critical that implementation and delivery be led by the participants and citizens whom we want to be involved: those who are most marginalised in their access to power and influence. The membership included independent experts who thought differently, but they, at least in some way, had access to influence and had been involved in such working groups previously. Involving citizens in delivery would be helpful.

The Convener: You have anticipated what I was going to ask. From what Kelly McBride has said, I understand how the workshops were constructed. I am interested in how the recommendations emerged. How did they surface? How did you come to agree on the recommendations?

Kelly McBride: I will say two things on that. First, at the workshops, there were a series of prompt questions that enabled us to surface the range of possible options during the discussion. Those options were then, as we called it, synthesised—some groups might have said the same thing, but another group might have said something different, so we brought the ideas together. We presented the range of ideas that had come up back to the group, and further discussion enabled us to

narrow down the preferred options. In the workshop settings, we were able to do that.

As I mentioned, feedback was given asynchronously, which enabled us to surface when further discussion was needed to allow tensions between different ideas to play out. Those ideas were brought back to the final workshop, when members of the group were given further opportunities to make comments. If people wanted to discuss different options and routes, we provided further opportunities to do so.

Building on what Talat Yaqoob and Fiona Garven said about the citizen voice, I note that the group is conscious that some of the recommendations require further discussion. That is why there are recommendations that further discussions be engaged in, and it is why the recommendations do not stray too far into the design of processes and systems. That is intentional, because the group realised that it would be preferable to involve more people in that conversation.

I will highlight two recommendations in particular, the first of which relates to the children and young people's symposium. Given that we did not have representatives of youth organisations or designated youth representatives on the group, we saw both an opportunity and a risk. There was a risk in the group making recommendations when its work had not involved the voices of all the people it was going to impact, but there was also an opportunity to bring together some of our wonderful youth organisations that work across Scotland to have a discussion about how they want to see that side of things progress.

We were also really aware—this relates to why the vision, the standards and the other bits are in a supporting document—that there needed to be some further and deeper engagement with local government. The group was very conscious that the local and community aspect needed much more conversation, with stakeholders in the room who were able to represent the breadth of local views. There is therefore a recommendation for further engagement on the local issue, because the group was very conscious that the local element is a huge part of how we institutionalise participatory and deliberative democracy. We were given a set remit at the start to focus in particular on citizens assemblies from one particular angle, but we purposely opened that conversation up in order to leave space to invite stakeholders to engage more deeply on it over the coming months, we hope.

The Convener: Thank you. As the consummate professional that you are, you anticipated where I was going to go with my next question. I was interested to know why the standards documents stand to one side. The theme is broadly similar to the one that you articulated in relation to some of the recommendations. We will probably touch on some of the groups, such as young people, who you mentioned.

You have set the scene on how the group operated, how the recommendations arose and what you thought the limits not of the recommendations but of the force behind them might have been. As we have discovered in our consideration of the issues, there are many voices to be considered in all of this, and although it may well be fortuitous if they come to similar views, we want to see whether that is actually what happens, rather than necessarily insisting that it be the case.

We will move on discuss the definitions, which are very interesting, with some questions from David Torrance.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Good morning. The first objective of the group was to come up with definitions. How did you go about doing that?

Kelly McBride: The first step was to give the group an open invitation to share definitions that they use in their everyday work. Those were collated in a document, and a smaller group was then brought together to review them. I highlight that we had particular input from academics who have worked to try to define some of the terminology, who were represented on the group. There was then a process of reviewing the options, refining them and having a sense check with the wider group to see that it was happy with them.

The initial list was drawn from our academic partners on the group, but others brought their experience and they were able to tweak the language that was ultimately included in the final report. There are some references in the document that have direct links to the sources or starting points for many of the definitions.

David Torrance: Will you go into more detail on why the definitions are not definitive?

Kelly McBride: Yes, indeed. There is some contestation, as we find in many parts of academia. People have done a really good job in trying to define what started as tricky concepts. There is no consensus in the literature as to what the ultimate definitions are. However, I do not think that that is a bad thing in the context of this work, because we are dealing with democracy and we understand that, in different contexts, people may want to have some room to manoeuvre and define things in ways that work for them in their setting.

Indeed, in previous work in Scotland—for example, most recently around the participation framework that is mentioned in the open Government action plan— there is no consensus over one form of how to frame the language around all these things. We find that different actors and different partners are using different language. I believe that that is one of the reasons why the task of trying to define that in the context of that work was set for the group, because it acknowledged that there is not one set agreed definition that is used as best practice by all the actors and internationally, if that makes sense.

Talat Yaqoob: I will add to that point. One of the reasons why the group membership was so varied—we had people from civil society, people from the third sector, academics and researchers—was to be able to have wide-ranging definitions. For example, the work that I have done on the matter is all direct engagement and participation—working with communities. The definitions that were used there focused on accessibility and ease compared with the definitions that might be used in academia.

Having that space for people who are working on those issues from very different perspectives to come together and get some consensus on those definitions was hugely beneficial. There is a fluidity involved in that, because some of the definitions

depend on the type of deliberative democracy methods that are then pursued. Although it might be difficult not to have definitions that are clear and straight cut, this is not clear and straight cut. In fact, to go in the direction that the citizens and participants are looking for, there needs to be some element of fluidity.

The definitions were created and the consensus was built from individuals who came together with years and years of expertise from very different backgrounds, which is why that exercise was really helpful in creating the foundations of the report, because it allowed us to think about the ways in which we had been delivering participation in our different arenas of public life.

David Torrance: What evidence is there to show how you came to your list of benefits?

Kelly McBride: I will turn to Fiona Garven and Talat Yaqoob to respond to that. Building on what Talat said, I note that a range of benefits were suggested by the various partners who were involved. When you look at the report, you will see that, drawing on all that experience, they have been organised into categories of benefits for people and communities, benefits for government and specific benefits for children and young people. There was further engagement around children and young people with various actors in civil society—youth organisations, specifically— to talk about that. Talat and Fiona can answer the question about benefits.

Fiona Garven: It is a shame that due to a family bereavement Oliver Escobar is not here to give evidence. In relation to the research support of the Citizens Assembly of Scotland, some of the benefits that were expressed by participant citizens are in the report. I was one of the facilitators in the Citizens Assembly of Scotland; we had continual conversations about people's participation, how it benefited them individually and how they could see how it could benefit wider society.

Along with the Democratic Society, as part of the follow-up support we supported a group of the citizens who took part in the Citizens Assembly of Scotland because those individuals wanted to continue to engage in democratic processes and to advocate for citizens assemblies and better participatory democracy in Scotland, as a foundation of our democracy and how it works. Many of the benefits in the report were expressed by citizens; they also came from research on citizens assemblies in Scotland, the United Kingdom and further afield.

Talat Yaqoob: I completely endorse what Kelly and Fiona have said. The report is evidence based: the benefits that have been explained come from citizens, participation efforts and academic research. It is important that those benefits are put in the context of the current political landscape, where there is decreasing trust in political processes and democracy. Among the clear benefits of the approach would be that, if it is implemented well, some of that trust would be regained, access to decision making would be opened to a much wider group of people and participation and a sense of ownership of the decisions that impact on our daily lives would be created. That applies particularly to people in the most marginalised communities.

There are very clear benefits; from my perspective, they clearly outweigh the risks for individual citizens, communities and local government all the way through to

Parliament and the Government. A range of benefits have been expressed in evidence from experts, and there is lived-experience evidence that has been gathered from lived-experience panels, citizens assemblies and other groups.

David Torrance: If the group considered the benefits of participatory democracy, it must have considered the risks. What are they?

Kelly McBride: One of the key risks that we talked about was the risk of doing participatory democracy badly. What we mean by "badly" is, for example, setting unclear expectations, failing to take inclusive approaches and failing to take account of equalities considerations. We also mean processes that involve people, but in which nothing happens at the end and it is unclear whether people's time and contributions have enabled change or whether action has been taken on the back of that.

That is why the group also considered what resources we need in order to implement the approach well. How do we bring people together to think about what happens next, after people have given their time and contributed? What does it mean to bring different actors together to think about the best way of governing such processes, so that they are trusted by, viewed as legitimate by and have buy-in from the wider public?

We also talked about other risks of such participation—for example, things happening at such a small scale that there is no public awareness of them. We know that media buy-in and mass-media messaging on such work have been quite difficult, up to this point. That is partly because it is such a new way of working and we must learn a lot as a society and across the system to understand participatory democracy methods and where and how they can best be used.

We also talked briefly about the risks of things happening in one level of governance but not involving other levels and layers, including what happens at community and local levels. The group identified early that, although we were brought together to talk primarily about citizens assemblies as one method of participatory democracy, and were talking about delivery at the central level, the approach needs to be considered as part of a wider system of democracy. I am sure that we will come on to talk about that wider system and the risks, at some point in this discussion.

We need to think about how what happens at the central level connects with lived experience and the reality that people face at various stages in their lives. That is why the group decided that we had to think about stuff that was happening in communities and how that would connect to things that were happening at the level about which the group was initially talking, as well as about how messages and learning about how it all works could be shared more widely across society, so that people feel as though they have the opportunity to get more involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

We are conscious that that will require a degree of culture change—a change in our approach to involving people in the various stages of policy processes and in discussion of the big issues that affect their lives. That is no easy task. Some

Governments around the world are now considering that and are making attempts to embed such approaches, but it is still early days, in many ways.

We are conscious that there will be a lot of learning on the journey, which means that we need many points for reflection to be built in along the way. The recommendations that the group came up with would allow that to happen at a pace that would enable moments at which to pause, reflect and adapt how we go, so that we build and develop a system of participatory and deliberative democracy in a way that can be improved. Democracy is not necessarily static; perhaps that needs to be reflected on from time to time. On the risks, there are points along the way at which reflection will be needed.

Talat Yaqoob and Fiona Garven can give a different take on the matter.

The Convener: Fiona, you particularly wanted to come in at this point.

Fiona Garven: I do not want to repeat everything that Kelly McBride has said. However, I reinforce that the group was very clear that citizens assemblies have to have consequences; something has to happen as a result of them. That is why it can be seen in the values and principles document that if we subscribe to that set of values and principles, whoever commissions or starts the assembly has to commit to responding to it publicly.

I will expand a wee bit on Kelly McBride's point about local democracy. The group said really clearly that a citizens' assembly is only one part of a participatory democracy infrastructure, and that participation has to happen throughout the system. From the perspective of communities, that is at the local government level and throughout. On its own, a citizens' assembly would have a limited impact. There is a risk that, if we were to run just one citizens assembly a year and there was just one element, that could be seen as tokenistic.

The Scottish Community Development Centre works directly with communities all the time. They are interested not just in policy issues and the bigger issues for society, but in what impacts them in their everyday lives. Therefore, some of the work has to sit alongside what will come through the local governance review and the review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, for example. It is about how we can start to shape democracy from the grass roots and at the local level, so that when people participate, they have much more agency and a much bigger stake in the process, so that better outcomes, policies and decisions are achieved.

Talat Yaqoob: I emphasise that it is very clear that the benefits far outweigh any risks that are associated with—[Inaudible.] I do not see risks in pursuing and embedding deliberative democracy. There are, however, two risks: that it is not done in the current landscape, and that it is attempted in an underresourced and incoherent way. Not pursuing methods of deliberative democracy and not opening the doors more competently to a much wider and larger group of people to engage in the decisions that impact on their lives is simply not an acceptable status quo for us.

We tend to focus on consultation methods and responses. When big decisions are being made, some outreach is pursued, but it is piecemeal at best. In a lot of the

persuasion and influencing work that I have been involved in over the years, I have noticed that consultations being used as a blunt instrument to try to get people to give their take on decisions that are being made are not fit for purpose, in the way that they are currently pursued. I believe that the risk is in not pursuing deliberative democracy to open the doors to decision making to a wider range of people.

The other risk is in implementing deliberative democracy in a way that is not fit for purpose or coherent across government in Scotland. We risk delivering it without the significant resource that it requires. That means that it will be done when it is nice to do it, not when it is necessary to do it; that it will give a feeling of tokenism to participants and citizens who want to take part in it; and that it might do more to create distrust. Very competent and well-resourced implementation is therefore required.

The risk is not in doing that, but in doing it poorly. We exist in a society in which there are systemic oppressions, discriminations and inequalities, especially for working-class communities; for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; for disabled people; for women; and for unpaid carers. That is the case for a number of marginalised groups. If implementation is not embedded in an anti-oppressive and fair power-redistributive and representative model, the risk will be that people who are at the sharpest end of policy making and who feel the effects of bad policy making and decisions will again be ignored in the new method of participation.

I do not think that there are risks in pursuing deliberative democracy; I think that there are risks in not doing so, and in doing so poorly.

The Convener: I will play devil's advocate. We are not here to establish a balance sheet between the two, but I am interested in understanding what you would say. A lady who works at my local baker's, which I get my messages from—to use the antique term—said to me that she elects me and has absolutely no interest in any discussion or involvement. She thinks very carefully about how she is going to vote for her elected representative and will get rid of them if she does not like the decisions that they make. That is how she wants to operate. Is that lady being marginalised by farming out the decision-making process to people over whom she has no democratic control? She has no mandate to determine who they are or what they discuss, and she has no control over the decisions or recommendations that they make. The process is voluntary; we cannot mandate that people participate. As politicians, we know that there is a very wide community of people who are not apathetic but who do not want to involve themselves in such a process.

I have posed this question in other forums, too. If one community is very interested in being involved in deliberative democracy and consultation and comes forward with a series of recommendations, but the community in the village next door is not interested in being involved and does not agree with anything that that group says, has that community been marginalised? The risk is that people could find that decisions that are prejudicial to them are being arrived at simply because they chose not to participate in a voluntary deliberative process.

I am not necessarily advocating that as a risk, but I am trying to articulate what I think might be an unforeseen consequential risk of the process being, in whatever sense, successful.

I am not sure whether Kelly McBride wants to have a bash at addressing that.

Kelly McBride: I will see whether Talat Yaqoob wants to respond first. I will come in afterwards.

Talat Yaqoob: I understand what the convener has said. I have been taking notes, so I have a few things to say.

The primary issue relates to what you said about some people being apathetic or not wanting to participate. It is really important to drill down to find out what makes people apathetic and not want to participate. The issue is not simply that people do not want to participate, full stop. Often, non-participation is a consequence of barriers, such as people not having the time to participate or not feeling that the method of participation is accessible. The situation is more nuanced—it is not just people not feeling able to participate or being apathetic. We need to drill down to find out why that is the case. Through a lot of the work that I do, we find that it is not that people are not interested in the decisions that are being made; it is that they do not see accessible routes for them to participate in decision making in the first place. Deliberative democracy is about attempting to create such routes.

A second issue is that deliberative democracy does not overtake representative democracy; it works in parallel and in connection with Parliament. There is no threat to how democracy operates currently. If anything, deliberative democracy enhances it by enabling parliamentarians to make decisions with evidence from a wider range of people who have experience of issues such as poverty, climate change and health inequalities—whatever the issue might be. Deliberative democracy provides input from a much wider range of people.

By the same token, we have people who do not want to vote. Do we consider those people to be marginalised? They have the choice to participate in the democratic process as it currently exists, and they would have the choice whether to participate in democratic endeavours that are being pursued through deliberative democracy. We are creating multiple ways of participating—we are creating as many platforms as possible for people to engage. Evidence tells us that that creates better decisions and results in outcomes that are fit for purpose.

The person whom the convener mentioned is not being marginalised, because deliberative democracy complements, and works alongside, representative democracy.

Fiona Garven: What has been said backs up our experience of working locally with community organisations as part of a wider community alliance in many different areas in Scotland. The issue is that, often, people do not participate because they do not know how.

Also, we find that people need the opportunity, motivation and capacity to participate. What often motivates people is the possibility of change. When they do not see the

consequences of their participating, that can lead to people asking what the point is in doing it.

In terms of moving to a more deliberative participatory democracy, we find that, often, the mechanisms for people to participate are used in hostility. You can see that writ large across the planning system. People might not participate when things are fine, but when something happens that takes out a transport route to a school or there is a new housing development, people suddenly participate. However, they tend to do so in quite a hostile way, as opposed to there being a process of participation and deliberation that can be embedded, and which looks at the needs of people who need houses as well as the needs of communities that need to keep their services intact and so on.

From that point of view, I agree with Talat Yaqoob and Kelly McBride: the risks of not going down a more deliberative route are larger, and the choices become much wider for people to participate on their own terms if we do go down that deliberative route. However, that does not negate the need for representative democracy; it sits alongside it.

We have also been involved quite a lot in participatory budgeting over the years. What we have seen, in other countries as well as in Scotland, is that when local politicians get involved in participatory budgeting processes, they get out there, meeting voters. They meet local people and can see the relationship developing in a positive way. They then can raise issues around what they know about in the communities and share what people are experiencing. We find that voter turn-out increases as a result of people engaging in those processes closer to home.

The Convener: Thank you very much. I hope that that was useful. The issue was in relation to referendums; the lady at my baker's that I mentioned did not want to have to be consulted in referendums, because she felt that she was being required to become much more knowledgeable about a subject than she felt comfortable about. That was the context of her saying that she elected people to take decisions for her.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the panel members for their comments so far.

When you identified the way forward, you wanted to be ambitious, creative and inclusive. To achieve all that, you needed to have a vision. That vision has come out a little bit in the discussion that we have had so far, but it would be good if you would identify how, as a group, you came about agreeing on a vision for the whole process.

Kelly McBride: I will start with the practical process.

We identified the different elements of the discussion that we had to have. That was done partly in the first workshop, but it also involved me drawing on experience of lead-facilitating and designing Scotland's previous citizens assemblies and knowing the different areas that, for example, the research and findings had touched on as elements that perhaps needed a bit of focus and attention, such as governance.

We broke that down into manageable chunks so that we could address each of those areas in turn. In doing so, we identified, as I mentioned earlier, a series of

different actions that could be taken. We then prioritised the actions that we thought would be the most effective and suitable in the context in which we are working and sought consensus from the group around that set of actions. We then stood back and looked at the set of actions as a whole. I mentioned that we had a final workshop to do that.

At that point, we saw how the different elements fit together and we thought about the coherence of that; there was further opportunity to refine it asynchronously beyond that.

That is the practical process for how we got to the different elements of the vision. Fiona and Talat—do you want to make any general comments on the vision?

Talat Yaqoob: It was pursued in a similar way to how the definitions were pursued. We had conversations about our expectations of it. When I work with participant systems on the ground, particularly through lived experience expertise, it is about looking at their vision for the access points that they want to be created so that they can input their expertise and influence decision making in Scotland. We went through the same deliberative process that we used for definitions and recommendations. Again, we leaned on the very different expertise from academia, research and civil society in the working group.

The Convener: Fiona Garven, do you want to add anything?

Fiona Garven: No, I have nothing to add.

The Convener: Kelly McBride wants to come back in.

Kelly McBride: It turned out that the working group was and is excited about the opportunity that Scotland has. I know that it is clichéd to say so, but many of us feel that Scotland is at the cutting edge of the exploration of participatory and deliberative democracy. In international settings in which I have the privilege of meeting people who are doing similar work, what we are doing in Scotland and the thought that we are giving the topic is a matter of discussion. The fact that we are sitting around the table today and able to discuss the matter so openly and transparently says a lot.

The vision that is included in our report comes from the place of knowing that we have something going in Scotland and that there is potential. Wonderful experiences are happening in pockets all over Scotland, and we can draw on them to say that there are examples of great stuff taking place. Fiona Garven has already highlighted the work that is happening in participatory budgeting, particularly at community level throughout Scotland.

That work is taking place in the context of many other organisations and groups that have come together to think about participatory and deliberative democracy talking about the potential that we have. The RSE Post-Covid Futures Commission, in which Talat Yaqoob was involved, has given some thought to the matter and made recommendations in its report that we have brought into our discussions and included in our report.

Drawing on our experiences of citizens assemblies as a starting point, the working group came to a conclusion early on that participatory and deliberative democracy is about much more than citizens assemblies. We are conscious that there is potential for the work to gain cross-party support. In fact, that is a really important element. It is important that we all understand how participatory and deliberative democracy can develop in Scotland and that we are invested and interested in it.

The recommendations in the report—

The Convener: We will come on to the recommendations. Paul Sweeney will deal with them in a second.

Alexander Stewart: You have identified your vision, which gives you your starting block, and you touched on the lessons that you have learned from citizens assemblies. Your goal is to enhance democracy but there is also a trust element, which is about individuals feeling that their participation makes a difference. Is there not potential that, if that does not happen in all cases, trust in your goal, aspiration and vision could be damaged?

The Convener: Talat Yaqoob was keen to come in. Talat, perhaps you could pick up Alexander Stewart's point as well as the one that you were going to address.

Talat Yaqoob: The point that I was going to make relates to the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission. I sat on that with a number of experts from across the private sector, public sector, third sector and beyond. It is not the only group that I have been on over the past three or four years in which there has been a push to pursue deliberative democracy.

It is important to emphasise that the IPDD working group is not the only group in Scotland that has the expectation and hope that deliberative democracy will be pursued well here. The creation of a national participation strategy and an expertise centre on participation were recommended in the Royal Society of Edinburgh's report and have been discussed in a number of other places. I emphasise that, although the working group came together backed by the Scottish Government, the matter is being discussed in other places, so it is timely that there is a response from the Scottish Government and that the matter be pursued.

On your question about trust, Mr Stewart, you are absolutely right that there is a risk that, if participatory and deliberative democracy is introduced in a tokenistic way, is not resourced well and is not implemented coherently across Government, people will not trust the process because they will see it as an extension of existing inequalities, consultation processes and things that they already feel far away from.

That is why we have emphasised the need for coherence, good resourcing, centres of expertise and a strategy, to ensure that whatever is implemented is implemented well and coherently in order to enable trust. I genuinely believe, and the evidence suggests, that if the approach is done well, it will go a long way to improving and repairing trust between those who make decisions and those who feel the impact of decisions. I understand the question, but the issue is really about poor implementation rather than the risk of deliberative democracy in itself.

Alexander Stewart: Have you identified any areas in which public participation is not suitable? As I said, there is a risk that damage could be caused by going down a certain route. Have you found any areas that we should stay clear of, because they could be problematic?

Talat Yaqoob: I could not cite any policy area that is not enhanced by the public having a say in decisions that affect their lives. Whether it is budgeting, the health service or climate justice, I do not see an avenue in which public participation does not make for better and more fit for purpose decisions and outcomes.

What matters is the method of participation. Citizens assemblies are not necessarily the go-to method. The method might be a lived experience expert group, pursuing participation with the third sector through service users, participatory budgeting or mini-publics. The method matters. However, I struggle to find any example where the outcome is not improved by citizens participating well.

Fiona Garven: I agree with Talat. Citizens assemblies work best when there is a specific focus and they are not considering a very wide question but are drilling down into a specific theme or topic. There is quite a lot of evidence from previous citizens assemblies that they are capable of discussing seemingly intractable issues. For example, there was the assembly in Ireland about abortion rights. Because assemblies are set up with processes and values in place, they are able to make sense of trickier issues.

The Convener: We come on to the recommendations in the report. Paul Sweeney will lead on that.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The recommendations are set out in summary and in detail in the report and cover two themes, which are

"developing a broad range of participation and democratic innovations",

and

"using this system as a basis to establish routine use of Citizens' Assemblies in Scotland".

On the first theme, different time periods are specified. There are early foundational actions, actions in the current session of Parliament to May 2026 and longer-term ambitions for consideration. Obviously, we know the length of the current parliamentary session, but the other time periods are perhaps not so specific.

There are significant asks of the Scottish Government. For example, there is a requirement for a unit in the Scottish Government with responsibility for participation, which seems to be a response to the objective of providing an indication of the necessary resources—obviously, that will have to be led by Government.

There are also a number of recommendations that engage the Parliament specifically. For instance, there are the recommendations to

"Adopt values, principles and standards for institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy in Scotland ... Support upcoming reviews and legislation to

embed participation and deliberation across the system ... Consider the proposals of the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Scotland for new infrastructure associated with the Scottish Parliament ... Collaborate with local government, public services and Parliament to establish and agree a clear agenda setting guidelines for all Citizens' Assemblies"

and to

"Connect to the Scottish Parliament Committee system for scrutiny of Citizens' Assembly processes and recommendations".

Bearing in mind the recommendations that engage the Parliament, how do the different categories and time periods relate to one another, and which are particularly time critical? What recommendation prioritisation took place in the group, and are there any critical recommendations that we should take particular note of? I open that

Kelly McBride: I will kick off, but other witnesses will have a perspective on the issue. Thank you for laying out how the recommendations have been set out; as you said, they are set out over different time periods. Foundationally, we are conscious that, for the work to work well and to ensure that it has the required resources behind it, we need people with the knowledge and expertise to drive delivery of all the recommendations and bring together the different stakeholders that are needed to make the work a success. I highlight the recommendation on the establishment of a participation unit, which came from the group's sense that there is a huge gap in responsibility for the delivery of many of the recommendations. If there is not a dedicated set of people with the responsibility to drive that, it could be a big point of failure.

It is very important over the longer term to learn, hold and ensure that we reflect on lessons as the work goes on. An evaluation and monitoring element is built into the work of the participation unit team, as well as responsibility for supporting the wider civil service and people who are tasked with making policy to understand what the work means and to go out and deliver it in other areas. I highlight that as an important starting point, because it is a huge gap.

You touched on Parliament, and I am aware that there are recommendations that do not necessarily direct the Parliament or local government in any particular way. As I mentioned, that was done on purpose, because it is important to say that, although members of the group talked about the role of local government, central Government, the Scottish Parliament, civil society and communities, the group had a specific remit to focus on actions that the Scottish Government needs to take at this point in time. We were cautious to respect the autonomy of the other parts of the system that I have just mentioned, but we were conscious that we needed to find ways of involving them to progress the work. Again, that is why we did not stray into things such as design, but we made recommendations that leave space open for further opportunities and bringing people together behind the values, standards and principles that we have reflected in the work.

Ultimately, the recommendations touch on a broader issue for democracy in Scotland. We are working in a multilevel system and we must understand the connections between different parts of the system. We have considered that and attempted to find ways to do it through our recommendations. I emphasise that, if we are to do that, we need the resources to do it and we need a skilled team of people who can bring people together, be connectors and—touching on comments that have been made—hold and facilitate spaces that enable conversations to happen in a way in which people feel that their voices are heard and we are able to build trust and consensus around how the work needs to move forward.

Talat Yaqoob and Fiona Garven might have specific thoughts on the recommendations in response to Paul Sweeney's question.

Talat Yaqoob: The recommendations talk about "Early foundational actions", the "Current Parliament" and "Long term ambition", which gives the timeline. The pressing issue is coherence across Government and Parliament. I would never want this to be pursued as an add-on in places where it feels easy to pursue deliberative democracy; it is about being coherent across different areas of Government and getting access to influence and have a stake in decisions across the board. The foundations of bringing people—including under-16s—and local government together to understand what the impact on them will be and what good design and delivery would look like for them are critical.

Equally, coherence is linked to the centre of expertise in the Scottish Government and the creation of a national participation strategy, which the Royal Society of Edinburgh has called for.

All those things are set out in the "Current Parliament" timeline over the next few years. They will create the foundation for good implementation and will provide us with an idea of the resourcing that will be required to enable the work to go forward. For me, the priorities are getting people from different areas of public life in Scotland involved and creating the participation strategy and centre of expertise, which will enable the work to be done well.

Fiona Garven: I do not have too much to add to what has been said. As well as developing coherence and putting in place a participation unit, a pressing issue is maintaining momentum on the delivery of deliberative processes, such as a young people's citizens assembly and so on. A constraint relating to setting up a Government unit is the perception about its independence, so the group's longer-term ambition is the creation of a national participation centre, which would be fully independent of Government and a democratic institution.

Paul Sweeney: Thank you for those answers. I am trying to establish an example on which there could be more rapid movement. Yesterday, there was a debate on the new national planning framework 4, and it was mentioned earlier that public engagement on planning can often be in the hostile context of a perceived threat. Has there been consideration of actions that the Parliament could take, perhaps through this committee or other committees, to advance the agenda of citizens assemblies or other approaches to deliberative democracy in relation to, for

example, NPF4 and reform of the planning system? Is that a particular case that the committee could take cognisance of?

Kelly McBride: There is a huge opportunity to involve people in a more deliberative way in the planning system. I do not want to stray too far into design issues, but there are some interesting models that could be explored. We could think about how there could be deliberations at local level and how they could connect to conversations under a more representative model. People across the country could be brought together to look at national approaches and strategies on planning.

I know that Fiona Garven raised the issue, so I will hand over to her.

Fiona Garven: The operation of the national planning framework would be a perfect area to use such a method in order to include community interests as well as those of developers. That is critical, because local place plans, which are a feature of the national planning framework, provide an opportunity for people to get involved. However, that might also just be an opportunity for those who are most able and most motivated to get involved with the planning system, which is notoriously tricky for people to navigate. It is critical that local place plans are accessible and reflect the voices and needs of marginalised groups in the planning system. Such a function could assist with that.

Paul Sweeney: [Inaudible.]—indicative set of practical opportunities that we might be able to pursue. You said that you do not want to jump the gun in relation to what resourcing might look like, but have there been any indicative costings for the resources that will be necessary to support the work that you are proposing?

Kelly McBride: I understand that Scottish Government colleagues were going to take that task forward. I do not have any concrete information on that to share today.

Paul Sweeney: No problem. Just to—

The Convener: We have—

Paul Sweeney: Sorry, convener.

The Convener: I was just going to say that that answer allows me to bring in Fergus Ewing with his questions on next steps, but go ahead.

Paul Sweeney: Do any of the witnesses want to make any final points on the report's implications for the Parliament? Is there anything that the committee should latch on to and take forward?

Kelly McBride: Generally, I hope that you get the sense from the report that there is a huge opportunity here. As has been already mentioned, we have not said too much about the Parliament, because we wanted to respect its role. However, as we have said in the report, we certainly think that, in the longer term, there is a role for the Parliament in undertaking some of the scrutiny work.

As a group, we are very interested and eager to find out what the Scottish Government's next steps will be and, in particular, whether it has any plans for how some of the early ideas at least can be resourced, given that they are intended to set

us up for all the actions and recommendations that are to follow over the other two time buckets. I would be very interested to know the response to that question when the time comes.

I am also aware that the committee has a meeting with the minister in June.

Fiona Garven: If the Parliament could help with making a lot of the different initiatives around participatory and deliberative democracy cohere, that would be really helpful. Earlier, we talked about the local governance review, which will enter a second phase, the review of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the work of the RSE, which Talat Yaqoob mentioned. Participatory democracy is everybody's business, but it would be helpful to have coherence in all those initiatives across Parliament and Government so that they can be greater than the sum of all their parts.

Talat Yaqoob: This parliamentary committee's role is to scrutinise whether this is being done well. As I have previously explained, there is greater risk in not pursuing deliberative democracy measures and this work, and there is equal risk in pursuing it badly. It is the role of Parliament—and there is a role for this committee in this, too—to scrutinise whether deliberative democracy is being delivered well and with the resources that are required; to create accountability around that; and to ensure that delivery is focused on ensuring that marginalised communities have better access to decision making and influence. I would not want to see the pursuit of some simplified or superficial version of deliberative democracy that gives those who already have access to influence and participation another such route. I believe that there is a role for this committee, Parliament and others in scrutinising the ability of the work to reach out to the furthest and most marginalised communities in Scotland, which is what is essential here.

The Convener: As we are coming towards the end of our time for this session, I ask Fergus Ewing to move on to the final questions, which are about the next steps and the Government's reaction.

Fergus Ewing: Good morning to the witnesses. Thank you for the work that you have carried out.

I want to ask about the next steps, and the reaction from Government and others. I have two questions for each witness. First, has the group had any initial reaction to its recommendations from the Scottish Government or, indeed, anyone else and, if so, what has that been? Secondly, what are the next steps for the work that the group has done and, indeed, for the group itself?

Kelly McBride: I will give a response as best I can, although I might not have all the information about the next steps that are planned for the Scottish Government.

We appreciate that our work and the recommendations that we have made are challenging, that they require culture to be changed and that the task can be difficult. It is important to note that we are delighted that the Parliament and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, for example, were able to join the group.

As for the reaction that we have received, members of the group met George Adam and Patrick Harvie in February to present the draft recommendations, and we had a fantastic discussion in that setting. I am not aware that we have received a formal written response or anything like that, and I am not sure whether that is planned, but we are aware that there is a meeting planned between this committee and the minister in June. We will be watching with interest to see any outcomes from that.

I am aware that the report has resource implications and that costing the delivery of the recommendations is a task for the Scottish Government—the group was not asked to do that. We hope that ministers will make the necessary commitment so that the ambitions for participatory and deliberative democracy can be realised. I will certainly be looking out for that as a next step.

This work absolutely needs people who have the knowledge and skills to be a driving force and to support colleagues across civil society, the civil service and other partners in Scotland in delivering on the ambition that we have set out in the report— and which is now becoming expected, I think, given all the different reports that, as Talat Yaqoob mentioned, have been published to that effect in recent years. I urge committee members to support the efforts to build that capacity and to ensure efficient and effective delivery of the recommendations.

I also hope that other actors across the system will be proactively engaged and given the opportunity to shape the plans so that we progress democracy across Scotland. That will require co-ordination, and I emphasise again the point about dedicated resource.

As for our next steps, there is absolutely continued interest in seeing a plan for delivering our recommendations. Members of the working group would like to be kept informed of progress, at the very least, and they are keen to hear about any opportunities to be further involved in ensuring that the recommendations become actions. We are very much waiting for further opportunities to be involved as a group. I know that some work will be on-going in the Scottish Government, but I am not best placed to comment on that.

As a group, we will also welcome any follow-up questions that might aid the work of this committee.

The Convener: I am mindful of the time, but I will bring in our other two witnesses. Talat, would you like to comment further, or has Kelly summed things up?

Talat Yaqoob: Kelly has certainly summed things up. I will not take up more time.

The Convener: Fiona, is there anything that you would like to add?

Fiona Garven: No.

The Convener: Fergus, do you have any other questions?

Fergus Ewing: I wonder whether Kelly McBride and the other witnesses believe that, as an essential ingredient for something happening, rather than not much happening or the momentum being lost, it is essential that there is one minister in the Scottish Government who will drive this forward, and that there is a clear lead—a

civil servant official—who will do so, too. It would mean that there would be someone to, if you like, deliver momentum, but also someone with whom the buck would stop.

Kelly McBride: I would certainly welcome that. That civil servant will need a skilled and experienced team to help them, but that is a good starting point.

Fiona Garven: It is critical to maintain momentum. A lot of the time, we try something once and, if everybody thinks that it is good, we generate a lot of enthusiasm, discussion and plans around it, but then it takes a long time to come out with something later on down the line. With the topic that we are discussing, it is critical that we continue to operate some public participation processes and ensure that we actually build citizens' awareness of them and the developments that are happening and being shaped up at the national level. That is a really important step.

Fergus Ewing: As a final thought, I note the point that, I think, Talat Yaqoob made about reaching those who do not usually liaise with, contact or otherwise participate in democracy with the Scottish Government or anybody else in public life. I wonder whether the duty lies with Government ministers and indeed MSPs to go out and meet those people, and, indeed, to be proactive in getting out there and going to visit them, particularly once Covid is over and we can get back into—and I put this in inverted commas—"normal life". Does the buck stop with ministers in particular, but also with MSPs and other elected people such as councillors and so on? Should that be the primary driver on the basis that we have an individual personal responsibility, in whatever capacity we have in public life, to try to reach out to those who are disadvantaged, underrepresented and uninvolved?

The Convener: Are there any final thoughts on that?

Kelly McBride: That is the basis of a strong and accessible representative democracy, and I certainly hope that MSPs take it very seriously. More of that certainly needs to happen. Constituents' access to MSPs and to Parliament is hugely important. However, that is different from what we are talking about when we discuss deliberative democracy and the particular systems and processes that can be created to enable conversations about issues of health, poverty, climate justice, transport or whatever.

It is important to note that deliberative democracy is not transactional in the way that an MSP asking a question or holding a surgery in their constituency is. Part of deliberative democracy is the opportunity to be explorative around issues, as Fiona Garven has said, and not simply to address them when something goes wrong and there is a need to respond.

It is hugely important that MSPs go out and meet people and that the buck stops with them on marginalised communities having access to representative democracy. That is a cornerstone of competent democracy, but it is parallel and adjacent to the deliberative democracy measures. Both things are required. They require a focus on marginalised communities, and they come together to create a strong and competent democracy, but they exist as two separate things.

The Convener: On that note, I draw our session to an end. I thank Kelly McBride, Fiona Garven and Talat Yaqoob for their comprehensive and helpful answers. That very useful discussion complements our previous evidence session, and I thank you all very much for your contributions and your participation today.

With that, I suspend the meeting for a few moments.

10:46 Meeting suspended.

Annexe B

Report of the Working Group on Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations: Participation and Democratic Innovations

Early, Foundational Actions

1.1 Adopt values, principles and standards for institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy.

1.2 Establish a Unit within Scottish Government with responsibility for Participation, including establishing Citizens' Assembly infrastructure.

1.3 Organise a children and young people's democracy symposium to co-develop a Citizens' Assembly for under 16s.

1.4 Organise a local government roundtable and work with local government to progress opportunities for participatory and deliberative democracy.

Current Parliament

2.1 Support upcoming reviews and legislation to embed participation and deliberation across the system.

2.2 Initiate the co-creation of a National Participation Strategy

2.3 Work towards improving training provision, including by establishing Scotland's Participation Academy, in partnership with academia, the public sector, and civil society.

Longer term ambition

3.1 Work towards establishing a National Centre for Participation in Scotland

3.2 Consider the proposals of the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Scotland for new infrastructure associated with the Scottish Parliament

Recommendations: Citizens' Assemblies

Guiding Principles

- Long-term investment and guidance for democratic innovation.
- Good governance
- A central source of knowledge and
- Clear expectations on required commitment of contributors

1. Put in place infrastructure to deliver on commitments to run routine Citizens' Assemblies, starting with Citizens' Assemblies already scheduled by Scottish Government.

2. Support further work to develop the Citizens' Assembly for under 16s, building on the outcomes of a children and young people's democracy symposium.

3. Adopt the values, principles and standards set out in this report to underpin all future Citizens' Assemblies, and work to build a trusted system that supports and understands these.

4. Ensure development of annual Citizens' Assemblies are sponsored and organised by a practice-led Unit that has clear responsibility and can ensure continuity of approach across policy areas.

5. Collaborate with local government, public services and Parliament to establish and agree clear agenda setting guidelines for all Citizens' Assemblies.

6. Establish a common research framework to apply to all future Citizens' Assemblies, and ensure research is at the core of learning, monitoring and supporting the impact of democratic innovations.

7. Connect to the Scottish Parliament Committee system for scrutiny of Citizens' Assembly processes and recommendations.

8. Adopt the initial governance proposals set out in this report to provide reassurance on independence and an ethical and credible process, with commitment that governance for new democratic innovations will be set out in a National Participation Strategy.

9. Establish an Oversight Board, bringing in external expertise to review and guide democratic innovations.

10. For each Citizens' Assembly process, establish an independent and practice-led Secretariat with delegated authority to organise and deliver the process.