



Local Governance Review – West Dunbartonshire

Community Planning West Dunbartonshire welcomes the aspiration and intentions of the Local Governance Review (LGR) and the opportunities this presents to work collaboratively to improve outcomes for all.

Work has been progressing locally for a number of years to strengthen local governance through the engagement of our citizens. Since 2016 we have carried out a programme of community-led budgeting which saw £425,000 of capital funding invested in community projects as determined by local residents. Alongside this we have also been engaging citizens to inform the design and delivery of services, at both a local community and authority wide level.

It is critical that this approach and the work of the LGR applies to all public bodies and not just to Local Authorities as this ensures that citizens are engaged with in a way which make sense to them and relates to outcomes. For example perception of safety or fear of crime may be an issue for a resident – this relates to a range of services within a local Council but also to Police, Scottish Fire & rescue Service, NHS, HSCP and others. This also allows more of a collaborative approach from public bodies in relation to working with communities to tackle inequality.

As the LGR progresses we are keen to see a number of areas developed and enhanced, building on the methodologies developed through local participative budgeting processes and engagement techniques. We are keen to see approaches developed which focus on how all public bodies work alongside citizens to design services which improve outcomes.

Place based planning

West Dunbartonshire Council is currently working as a 'lead practice' area for Scottish Government to inform the Planning Bill, focused on the alignment of community and spatial planning. This recognises the importance of planning for a local place and working together with our citizens to determine long term priorities which can be jointly delivered by residents and services. As the review progresses we are happy to share our approach and thinking on this model. This builds on a local programme of activity working under the banner of Your Place, Your Plan which is routed in the successful track record we have in West Dunbartonshire of progressing community led regeneration through charrette activity.

Alignment of national services /strengthening long-term planning

It would be beneficial if the review facilitates alignment of longer term planning across all public bodies working in an area. This has proven to be significantly challenging in previous years given the different lines of accountability and national priorities that partner agencies are working to. This applies to planning of services but also to the alignment of budget planning. Longer-term financial planning, across public bodies, would remove the annual uncertainty around settlement and allow for more collaboration and long-term planning to take place. However, while all public bodies involved in delivering on local governance and strengthening participative democracy and collaborate on longer term planning, real and sustained change will not be effected until they are required to align and set budgets jointly based on local long-term priorities. At present public bodies make commitments to long term aspirations through Local Outcome Improvement Plans; strengthening of joint planning and resourcing requirements would add weight to this.

Not only would this allow for the better strategic alignment of long term priorities and plans across the partnership but it would also allow for better coordination of engagement and collaboration with citizens. This model would be supported locally by the ongoing work with the Scottish Community Development Centre on a community informed long term Empowerment Strategy. Work is underway to develop this strategy, with a number of community conversations being held to inform priorities and areas of work.

This model would create the conditions for the embedding of participative democracy and allow citizens, who know their needs and their local community best, to be fully empowered to influence the long term plans for the area and to lead delivery of aspects of these plans. In addition this would also make it possible to localise national commitments and ensure they are delivered in a way which makes sense to local citizens and align with local priorities.

Local Accountability

As with alignment of national service/agencies, the strengthening of local accountability ensures empowerment is at the heart of local service planning and delivery by ensuring the local needs of an area are the focus of discussion and action. Placing community planning at the heart of this activity ensures that all partners are equally accountable at a local level. However further measures would be required to ensure that all public bodies engaged in community planning are equally accountable. At present this local accountability does not apply equally to all partners and bodies as a result of differing governance arrangements. Using community planning partnerships as a vehicle for all future governance discussions to ensure that the local agenda can sit central to planning only provides a solution if more robust joint working and resourcing arrangements are in place.

We recognise the challenges faced in delivering this across national public bodies, however feel it is essential to future delivery of the aspirations of both community empowerment and local democracy. Linked to this is the need to utilise City Region areas for further collaboration and joint work, building on the commitments made through city deal activity.