

Corra Foundation, People in Place programme

Corra Foundation's [People in Place programme](#) uses innovative place-based approaches to help people and communities to create positive change. Through the Getting Alongside Communities element of the programme we are currently working alongside [nine communities](#) in Scotland.

The community is at the heart of everything we do. Each community we work with has a dedicated Community Co-ordinator, who will get alongside the community by listening, bringing people together for conversations, and to identify shared priorities. The focus is on inclusive engagement. We help facilitate and enable capacity building within the community; widening community participation, seeking out voices that are seldom heard; and ultimately resulting in locally-led actions being taken.

Of the nine communities we are getting alongside, two communities held democracy matters conversations. Our work and wider conversations within communities have demonstrated that many believe there is a democratic deficit leaving local people disengaged from decision-making. Recent Place Standard scores in Langlees evidence this, with 'influence and sense of control' scoring one out of seven.

The People in Place programme has also observed that with the right structures in place local people can be supported to be a part of community-led action and decision-making. The [Cumnock Action Plan](#) is an example of an inclusive and proactive engagement process that sought the views of local people on what matters to them and identified opportunities for action and integrated them into statutory community planning processes

Democracy matters conversation Fernhill, South Lanarkshire.

Four people took part in the conversation. In attendance were two residents, a local councillor and a local minister.

Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest.

- The group discussed that often people get involved in decision-making processes when they are reacting to a problem. For instance, anti-social behaviour or issues with housing. There was a consensus among the group that when people feel directly affected by an issue in a community they may be more inclined to join a local

committee to express their concerns, however may not engage in decision-making long term once an issue is resolved.

- A neighbourhood board was established as part of the regeneration in the community, the group commented that this works well when residents and housing representatives are committed and proactive.
- There was a question around the current flow of information and decision making between boards, councils and local people. For instance, local people might not be involved in processes at the start or might not hear about developments in their community until the process has already begun.

When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?

- 'Local' can mean different things to different people in the community. People of different generations may identify with different aspects of the local area. For decision-making and planning within communities it is important to understand local context and history. Definitions of 'local' could be affected by a history of tension between neighbouring communities and new housing developments.
- Community engagement is the starting point to enabling community led decision-making. It is important to understand the context of a local area and the potential barriers to engagement. For instance, issues associated with territory, and stigma that could be attached to those involved in decision-making in the community (for instance, associations of authority and power that separate 'decision-makers' from other people in the community).
- It matters to feel safe and the physical appearance of the street you live in.

"I like my street, there's trees, no houses at the back. I don't feel part of a scheme"

Are there existing forms of local level decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?

- Community members need to know how they can get involved.

"A lot of people have good ideas, but they don't always know who to tell"

- The group noted that there is a real challenge getting people involved in community development groups and meetings. Sometimes it is a personal want or need to come along to consultations. For instance, if a community member has a concern or topic in mind it might motivate them to come along to a community meeting.

- There is a barrier to getting involved in community work, as some may associate it with authority and the police which can have negative connotations for some people in the community. The group mentioned that some of the older generations perceptions of community are still rooted in territory and boundaries.
- Community consultations and activities that result in no real change for local people can damage trust and hinder future efforts to engage with community members.

“Big interventions that fell through once they got what they wanted, they leave”

Do you have any other comments, ideas or questions? Is there more you want to know?

- It is important to understand the context of a local area and the potential barriers to engagement. For instance, issues associated with territory, stigma of playing a role in community decision making.
- History and demographic of a local area are important factors when considering the extent community members may engage in decision making processes. For instance, history of when community engagement has worked and when it has not been accessed by the community.
- Different generations will engage and respond to community developments in different ways. The group mentioned that some older people may continue to perceive the different parts of the community negatively due to past territorial tensions.
- There is a challenge turning reactive community engagement into long term community involvement and action.

Democracy Matters conversation in Blacklands, Kilwinning.

Twenty local people attended the session and centred their conversation around the current challenges and opportunities for locally led decision making in their community.

Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?

The community members discussed that they would like to have more opportunities to be involved in high level decision-making, such as housing, regeneration, education and budget allocation affecting their local area.

The group also spoke of the need to challenge attitudes that local decisions are ‘*somebody else’s responsibility*’ and encourage greater community-led action and participation.

The group identified several key issues that they would like to be involved in the decision-making processes for:

- Attracting new businesses to the area was important to the community and the group recognised that the cost of rent in the centre of the community can prevent new business developments.
- Improve the use of council properties to provide spaces for local people to meet, such as a safe space for children and young people to go. The group discussed that the cost of hiring a room within a council building can prevent local people making good use of the space in the community, and for that reason council properties are often closed and under-used.
- Green space was also highlighted as an important asset for the community and there was an agreement that the amount of derelict land and buildings should be reduced.
- Parents would like to have greater involvement in budgetary spends in education. An example given by the group was the post-code lottery of where you live and the school your child attends may determine what musical instrument they are taught.
- Concerns were expressed over anti-social behaviour in the area, and the need for greater community consultations on issues like this with the aim of forming a collective solution.
- Access to local services was identified as important and changes to services should reflect the needs of local people. For instance, changes to GP services can affect how easily people can make appointments.

Closing reflections and questions.

- **What are the structures and approaches that support decision-making at a community level?**

Corra Foundation has learned that the right structures within a community can lay the groundwork for locally led action and positive change. There is a need to understand the opportunities for local influence and democracy in the wider context of systems change, learning from evidence from successful community engagement activities and decision making.

- **How can local people be supported to play a role in community engagement and decision-making, ensuring reactive engagement becomes long-term proactive participation?**

The community Democracy Matters conversations highlighted some of the challenges around effective engagement to elicit local decision-making, with local people commenting that reactive participation can result in short term engagement. Reactive engagement (e.g. concerns over a local issue being the key motive for involvement) is a positive indication of people wanting their voice heard on matters important to them and exploring the structures in a community that can foster feelings of collective influence and responsibility amongst local people is important to ensure people continue to express their views.

- **How do we ensure that local governance and decision making reflects the needs and aspirations of the community?**

Being mindful that one-size does not fit all when working alongside communities, has been key to Corra Foundation's People in Place programme. Listening to the stories and experiences of local people in each community, to understand the history, assets and challenges helps to build a unique community profile that shapes approaches to engagement and change.

Corra Foundation will continue the conversation with communities and partners delivering place-based approaches on how local democracy is defined, implemented and realised for communities across Scotland and would welcome further opportunities to inform the local governance review.

Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. We work closely with other charities and funders, communities and policy makers to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Our vision is for a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

For more information on the People in Place programme visit:

<https://www.corra.scot/people-in-place/> or contact Allan Farmer, Head of Place allan@corra.scot