

From mountain to sea

# Participation Request Workshop Summary Report

## April 2019

“Increased community empowerment and improved and equitable participation in decision making around participatory budgeting policy.”



## 1 Overview

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 introduced a new means by which community groups can request to be involved in, and influence over, decisions and services that affect communities. This involvement is described as an outcome improvement process and is initiated by a participation request.

The intention was to provide a new way for communities to initiate dialogue with public bodies on their own terms, with scope to raise issues that are important to them. By engaging in an outcome improvement process it is expected that community bodies will gain a better understanding of the complexity of some problems and the constraints on the council as they help in seeking to address them.

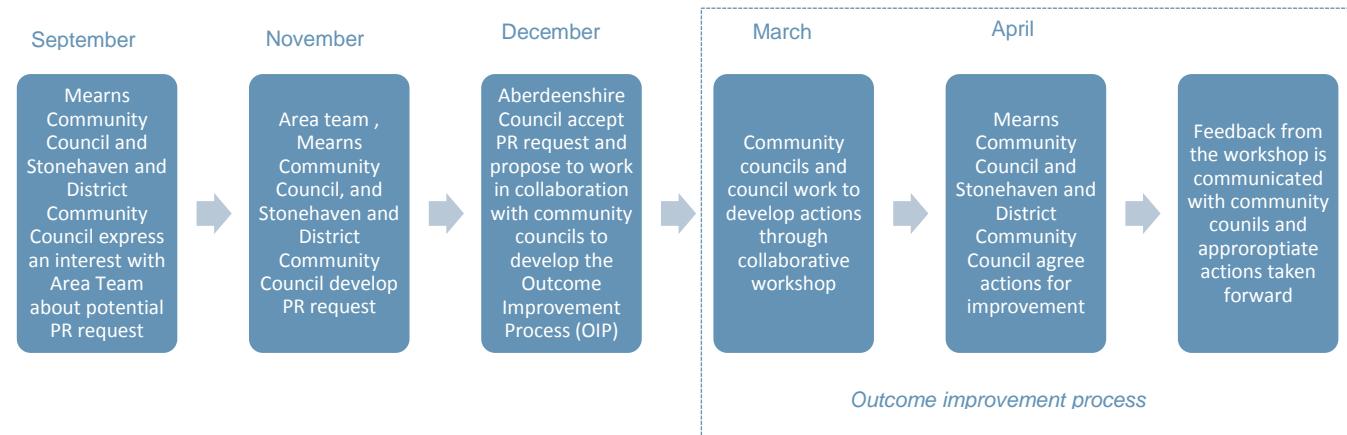
Participation requests are not intended to replace good quality existing community engagement or participation processes, nor to be an extension of complaints procedures. They are a framework for initiating dialogue where communities find it difficult to be recognised or heard.

In November 2018 Mearns Community Council and Stonehaven and District Community Council submitted a participation request to Aberdeenshire Council stating the outcome that several Community Councils would like considered is increased Community Empowerment and improved and equitable participation in decision making around participatory budgeting policy.

The Council published a decision notice on 10 December 2018 with a proposal to develop an outcome improvement process collaboratively. In March 2019 a workshop was facilitated to start to develop the outcome improvement process and was followed by a meeting between representatives from Aberdeenshire Council and Mearns Community Council and Stonehaven and District Community Council to discuss themes and next steps for developing the process.

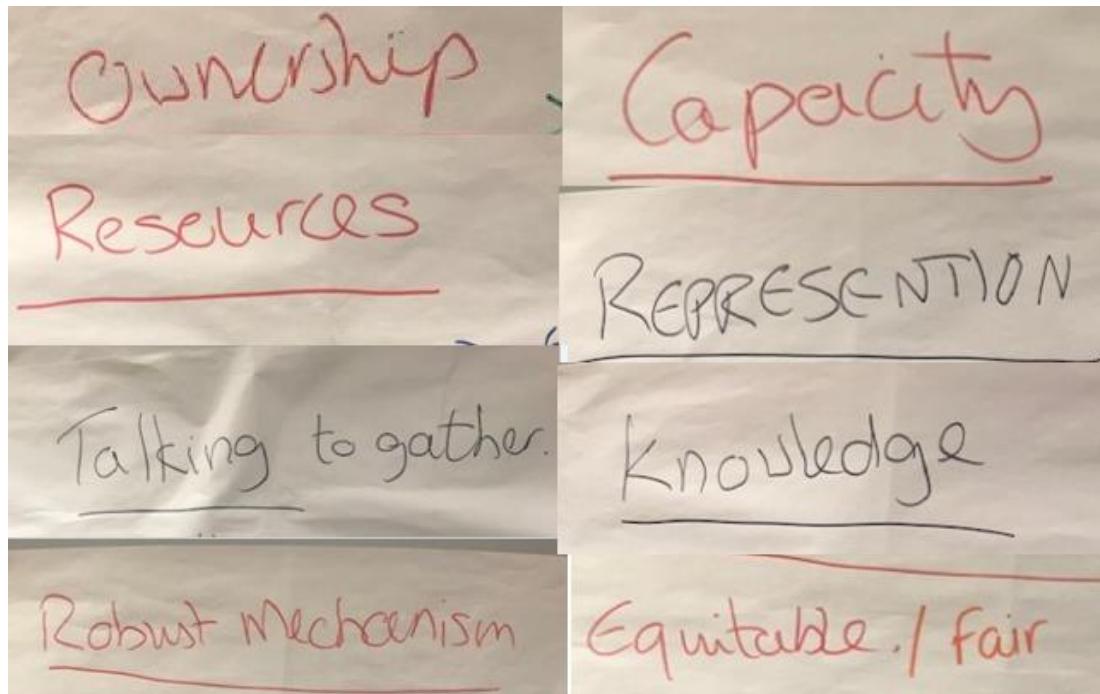
Figure one summaries the Outcome Improvement process initiated by the Participation Request submitted by Mearns Community Council and Stonehaven and District Community Council in November 2018.

Figure 1: PR process



## 2 What we heard

To help understand and develop a shared understanding of community empowerment and Participatory Budgeting, delegates were asked to discuss what community empowerment and Participatory Budgeting meant to them to then identify what could be improved to increase community empowerment and improve participation in decision making around Participatory Budgeting policy.



Conversations highlighted that Community Empowerment and Participatory Budgeting are linked and had a number of common characteristics, challenges and barriers. The characteristics of community empowerment and Participatory Budgeting highlighted include: ownership (of local issues), capacity (ability, time), resources, representation, talking to gather (community engagement), knowledge, robust mechanisms (processes), strong partnerships and collaboration between public agencies and members of the community and, equitable/fair methods.

It was also clear that both community empowerment and Participatory Budgeting are interlinked with the relationship between the Council and the wider community and how the council (and other public agencies) involve the community in local decision making.

Community Empowerment . . .  
 . that our voices are heard  
 . and acted on

Key challenges identified to progressing Community Empowerment and equitable participation in decision making around participatory budgeting policy were identified and displayed in figure 1.

Figure 2: Challenges/barriers

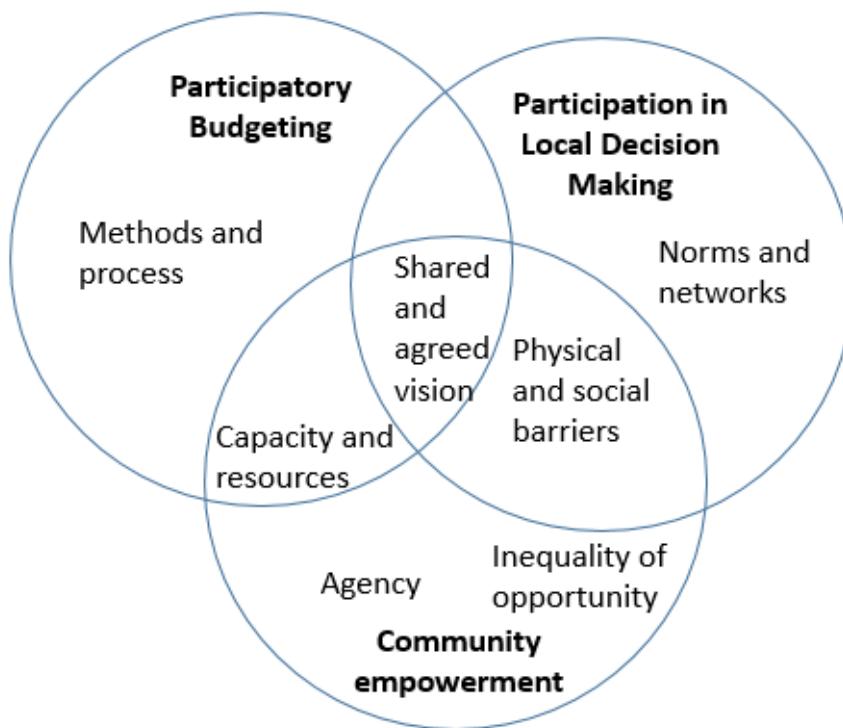


Figure two shows challenges and highlights that participants suggested they needed empowerment through a number of ways, including:

- A common and agreed vision using appropriate language, with accessible information, listening and dialogue.
- Improved relationships, shared norms and networks.
- Permission to take responsibility for local issues
- Equity in opportunity to participate
- Opportunities to participate that are flexible and provide a variety of options that fit in with people's everyday lives
- Resources and skills to implement change

In trying to suggest some ways forward, instead of focussing on negatives of past experience figure three identifies ingredients for success for increased community empowerment and improved and equitable participation in decision making around participatory budgeting policy that were highlighted during discussion.

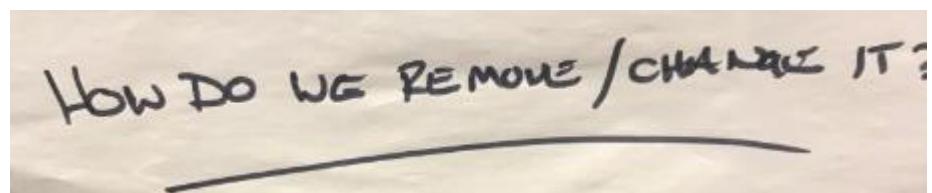
Figure 3: Ingredients for successes

✓ Transparency /Accountability	✓ Partnerships/relationships
✓ Communication	✓ Fairness
✓ Legitimacy/agency	✓ Opportunities
✓ Resources/capacity	✓ Support
✓ Flexibility	✓ Transformation/change
✓ Impact	✓ Dialogue
	✓ Enablement
	✓ Equity

When asked about supporting their communities participants highlighted a number of positive experiences. The common theme between participants was that the support they provided resulted in a positive impact for their local communities. Examples included setting up a local resilience group which were successfully awarded funding, identifying a need in the community for improved play park facilities and setting up a group to develop a proposal, securing funding and then building a new facility in the community. When asked about what made these situations work well participants identified that local knowledge and volunteers within communities were key components.

Participants were asked to imagine its 2025 and identify what would be different from now so that Community Councils and the Council are working together to ensure communities are empowered. Changes included:

- Devolved decision making so community councils can act on local issues in practical ways
- Improved engagement at a “grass route” level.
- Stronger partnerships between community councils
- Better use of technology
- Improved communication and trust between the council and community council
- Opportunities to influence strategic issues
- Community councils to be more valued by the council and the wider community
- More responsibilities for community councils and improved engagement with the community
- Procedures and standards to enable community councils to fulfil their role



When Community Councillors were asked to reflect on their experience and identify factors of an effective process, critical components included:

- Leadership

- Transparency
- Ability to implement change
- A clear objective with outputs and solutions
- Understanding of the issue

Participants were then asked to identify core factors of what needs to be in place for success. Common responses included:

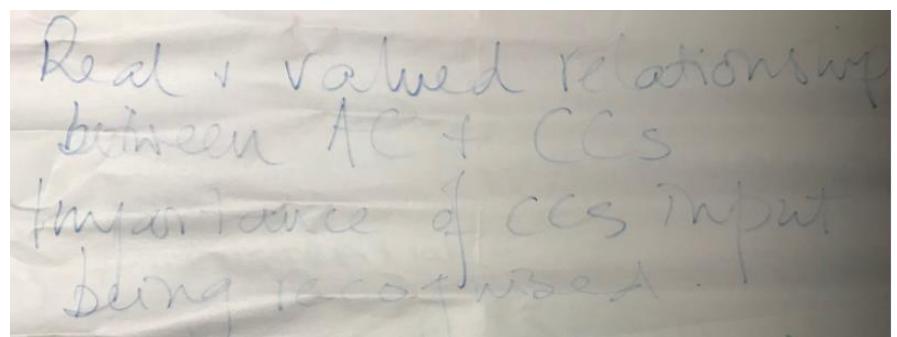
- Local knowledge
- Objectives
- Support
- Relationship with decision makers

Through reflections participants identified that a process may want to consider who will be affected by the outcomes as they should be involved in both influencing and implementing the process. Good communication and regular progress updates as well as collaboratively monitoring actions were all highlighted as ways to ensure a process is successfully implemented and focused on outcomes.

Participants noted that where communities are empowered there would be a range of expected benefits including; increased confidence and skills among local people, increased satisfaction with quality of life in a local area, higher numbers of people volunteering in their communities and an increase in participation in community activity.

Throughout the session there were a number of recurring themes and actions identified that participants felt are important for improving the outcome. These included:

1. To improve the identified outcomes it will involve a combination of strategic/cultural changes and transactional improvements to current processes and procedures e.g. the exchange of information between the council and the community council.
2. There is a need to develop an approach with a focus on mainstreaming (and the 1% commitment) to ensure Participatory Budgeting is used appropriately and there is sufficient scope to tailor processes to local circumstances.
3. To support increased community empowerment, clarity or/and support is needed for community councils/the wider community to take ownership of local issues which will result in a positive impact/improved outcome
4. Improvement needs to be made in how community councils and the wider community are involved in decision making. Specifically improvements in how community councils are asked to participate in engagement and consultation.



*"Real and valued relationship between AC and CCs.  
Importance of CCs input being recognised."*

5. Community Councils may benefit from the Council and other partner agencies taking a developmental/enabling role to improve community empowerment supporting community councils take ownership of local issues

6. There is a need to show and make clear the inputs into decision making and the balance between representative, community influence and professional officer input.
7. Information should be equally available to the community, community councils, and partner agencies. Information should be clear in plain English and be tailored for the audience.



### 3 Proposed next steps

	Action	Method	Lead	When
1	Feedback and “test” messages from Outcome Improvement Process Workshop to all community councils	Email to workshop attendees initially followed by all community councils Publish report online	<b>Engagement and equalities team</b>	<b>May</b>
2	Support a Community Council group made up of community councillor representatives and Aberdeenshire Council officers		<b>Engagement and equalities team and Community Cllrs involved with PR request</b>	<b>May - June</b>
3	Explore method to share information online	Knowledge hub/Yammer/website	<b>Area teams/ Engagement and equalities team</b>	<b>May – June</b>
4	Sign up to Participatory Budgeting champions Scotland programme		<b>Community Cllrs</b>	<b>Spring</b>

5	Consult Community Council representative group on key principles for a Aberdeenshire Council Engagement and Participation Policy		<b>Community Engagement Steering Group</b>	<b>May - June</b>
6	Involve Community Council group in the implementation of Engagement and participation policy including developing the process for involving community councils in Participatory Budgeting exercises		<b>Community Engagement Steering Group/ Community Council group</b>	<b>May - July</b>
7	Promote/review Code of Practice for the Exchange of Information between Community Councils and Aberdeenshire Council	Include in light touch review of scheme of establishment	<b>Area teams/internal communications/ Community Council group</b>	<b>ASAP</b>
8	Develop/promote community engagement and communication training for community Cllr's	Review existing material e.g. improvement service, ALDO training, annual supporting communities day	<b>PPI/Area teams / Communication team/all community councils</b>	<b>Sep</b>
9	Support opportunities for collaboration between community councils		<b>All Community Councils</b>	<b>Sep</b>

10 | April 2019

10	Promote the success/work of community councils	Promote through existing communication and look into possibility of annual report	<b>Community Council group/ All Community Councils/area teams/corporate communications</b>	Dec/Jan
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