
**Participation and representation:
Strengthening the third sector voice in
local governance**

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Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction.....	3
Insights	5
Implications	6
Conclusion	6
Introduction to paper	7
Third sector interfaces and community planning.....	7
The evolution of third sector interfaces in Scotland.....	7
Community planning	9
The third sector and community planning.....	10
Challenges for TSIs in participation and representation	11
Case study in participation and representation: STRiVE	12
TSI profile in East Lothian	12
Developing a new approach.....	13
Moving forward with a new approach to representation	17
The delegate approach to representation	19
Insights from STRiVE’s participation and representation Initiative.....	20
The current system of third sector representation struggles to be effective & democratic	20
Local third sector organisations are keen to develop new processes to strengthen participation and representation.....	21
Democratisation can be initiated from the top	21
Bringing third sector organisations into local governance requires negotiation	22
The commitment to subsidiarity in CPPs is a qualified one	23
There is strong democratic potential in the TSI being a facilitator and an enabler, rather than a representative	23
Conclusion.....	24

Executive summary

“What this process did is it put the sector’s voice at the heart of community planning rather than our voice”

Eliot Stark, Chief Executive, STRiVE

Introduction

This case study highlights the work of STRiVE, a third sector interface in East Lothian, and its initiative to strengthen the participation of third sector organisations in local governance. The report details STRiVE’s journey: it outlines the context of the work, the process that was deployed, the challenges that were faced and the outcomes of this deliberative exercise. As reflected in the opening quote from STRiVE’s chief executive, the process resulted in a fundamental shift in how the third sector is represented in East Lothian; rather than the third sector voice being mediated by STRiVE, third sector organisations now participate directly in the process of selecting delegates and in being delegates in local governance processes.

The context of this work is the local democracy agenda. In Scotland this is most clearly evidenced by the *Christie Commission on Public Services*¹, the *Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy*², the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015*³ and the *Local Governance Review*⁴. The question of how people and organisations participate in local decision-making is at the heart of this work.

This case study is about a third sector interface (TSI). There is a TSI in each local authority in Scotland. One of the roles of the TSI is to bring a third sector voice into local governance processes, particularly in community planning. Generally, the most senior staff representative of a TSI fulfils this role. The responsibility of a TSI to represent the voice of a diverse and, at times, disparate third sector is widely recognised to be unrealistic and untenable⁵. Despite recognition that there is not a third sector voice, third sector representatives are often asked for “the view” of the sector.

One of the authors organised two deliberative processes with a group of TSIs. One process took place in 2014 as part of the *Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy*. The other

¹ Christie Commission, 2011. *Report of the Future Delivery of Public Services by the Commission* chaired by Dr Campbell Christie. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/352649/0118638.pdf> Accessed 30.10.2018.

² Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy. 2014. *Effective democracy: Reconnecting with communities*. Edinburgh: Convention of Scottish Local Authorities <https://www.localdemocracy.info> Accessed 30.10.2018.

³ *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament

⁴ For more information about the Local Governance Review see the Scottish Government website <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/improving-public-services/local-governance-review/> Accessed 30.10.2018.

⁵ Escobar, O. 2015. *Reimagining Community Planning in Scotland: A vision from the Third Sector*. Edinburgh: WWS and Voluntary Action Scotland. <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/reimagining-community-planning-in-scotland-a-vision-from-the-third-sector/> Accessed 5.12.2018.

was in 2015, and was co-organised by Voluntary Action Scotland. Through these processes two interconnected issues were identified: representation and participation. It was recognised that in order to be more influential in local governance, TSIs needed greater participation of local organisations in their work in order to more effectively represent third sector views.

STRiVE, an organisation that delivers on the TSI mandate in East Lothian, was interested in involving local third sector organisations in how to strengthen participation and representation. STRiVE's chief executive, Eliot Stark, engaged the authors to develop a deliberative process with local organisations. The participation and representation process – promoted as 'bacon butty blethers' – began in late 2015. Over a period of ten months, 29 organisations participated in three deliberative workshops and an online phase. The four proposals developed out of this process were:

1. Create an online platform to support engagement between third sector organisations to improve coordination, discussion and representation.
2. Develop a membership system for third sector participation and representation.
3. Map who represents the third sector across East Lothian.
4. Develop a coordinated delegate system to improve third sector representation and impact across East Lothian.

STRiVE's board supported the two complementary proposals of mapping the sector and creating a coordinated delegate model. This new approach to engagement and representation was announced at the organisation's annual conference in September 2016.

While the third sector response to the proposals was positive and organisations put themselves forward, the process of negotiating changes in the representation of the third sector with the East Lothian Partnership board was more protracted. An agreement between STRiVE and the board took nine months to negotiate and resulted in a compromise where, in addition to there being a system of third sector delegates, STRiVE continued to sit on the board. This arrangement reflects the dual role that STRiVE plays - both as a TSI and an organisation that delivers services (some on behalf of the council). The fact that STRiVE plays a dual role can be traced back to the creation of the TSI model which resulted in existing organisations merging into one. Delegates from third sector organisations now sit on all the key partnerships in East Lothian. This exercise in changing the participation and representation of local organisations in local governance revealed a number of insights.

Insights

The current system of third sector representation struggles to be effective and democratic

A model that is built upon one individual representing the diverse views of the third sector is not only untenable, it is also detrimental⁶. Such a model limits the range of perspectives and experiences that can be contributed by the third sector in local governance. There are many ways in which the third sector can and should contribute to governance; models that support and coordinate these efforts are likely to be more effective than a singular model.

Local third sector organisations are keen to develop and engage in models to strengthen participation and representation

The STRiVE initiative engaged a total of 29 organisations over a period of ten months. People from the sector had many ideas to contribute and were willing to commit their time and energy to the process. Furthermore, individuals were willing to put themselves forward to be delegates for the sector.

Democratisation can be initiated from the top

It is an interesting juxtaposition that a process that was about democratic innovation should be initiated by the chief executive of an organisation rather than from the grassroots. The initiative involved risk for the organisation and its board. The shift in the organisation's role as a TSI was a significant one and reflects a strong commitment to local engagement. It also demonstrates the importance of new forms of public service leadership.

Bringing third sector organisations into local governance requires negotiation

Local governance arrangements are dominated by statutory partners. Negotiation is required to bring third sector organisations into these arrangements in meaningful ways. Challenges exist in part because they are fundamentally different types of organisations, with different histories, complex relationships with their constituencies, and less capacity than their statutory partners. In this particular case, a negotiation was required that reconciled the TSI's dual role as a platform for the sector's representation and a service delivery organisation.

The commitment to subsidiarity in CPPs is a qualified one

Despite the stated aim of community planning to "make sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them"⁷, research about CPPs across Scotland reflects that there is often a disconnect between the philosophy

⁶ Escobar, O. 2015. *Ibid.*

⁷ Scottish Executive. 2004. *The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 – Community Planning: Statutory Guidance*. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/47237/0028845.pdf> Accessed 5.12.2017 p.1

of community planning and the actual practice of it⁸ & ⁹. Making sure that TSIs are able to bring third sector voices into the partnership process is paramount to enable their substantial contribution to public service governance. Therefore CPPs will benefit from supporting efforts to improve participation and representation in the local TSI.

There is strong democratic potential in the TSI being a facilitator and an enabler, rather than a representative

TSIs are potentially well placed to act as networks and platforms that enable the third sector to mobilise, deliberate and act together on issues of shared concern. The legitimacy of a TSI depends on its capacity to enable diverse voices in the sector to participate. Legitimacy can turn into influence in local governance if a TSI can demonstrate broad sector engagement in shaping collective priorities and action.

Implications

Third sector organisations play a key role in local governance. The experience they bring from the frontlines and their understanding of the delivery of public services is invaluable to community planning. Third sector voices can help support effective public services.

The STRiVE experience highlights the potential for third sector interface organisations to play a facilitating and enabling role, rather than a traditional representative one. There is much to learn from this experiment in East Lothian – for practitioners, whether in the third or statutory sector, and for researchers.

Conclusion

A TSI that works more democratically can help to enable better representation of the diversity of third sector voices. This, in turn, increases its legitimacy and scope for influence. It is harder for other local actors and institutions to disregard a TSI that can demonstrate strong democratic credentials. Stronger third sector representation can, in turn, help to improve local governance and outcomes for the communities it serves.

⁸ Escobar, O., K. Gibb, M. Kandlik Eltanani, & S. Weakley. 2018. *Community Planning Officials Survey: Understanding the everyday work of local participatory governance in Scotland*. Edinburgh: What Works Scotland.

⁹ Weakley, S., & O. Escobar. 2018. *Community Planning after the Community Empowerment Act*. Edinburgh: What Works Scotland. <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/community-planning-after-the-community-empowerment-act-second-survey-of-community-planning-officials/> Accessed 5.12.2018

Introduction to paper

The development of third sector interfaces (TSIs) in Scotland has had a short but eventful history. TSIs are, amongst other things, vehicles for ensuring a third sector voice in local governance. This role entails various challenges, including the task of representing the views of a constituency of hundreds of diverse third sector organisations across each local authority area. This paper explores this fundamental challenge through a case study of a TSI that is championing new forms of participation and representation. The case illustrates an attempt to transform the TSI into a more democratic space.

The learning from this case is of relevance not only to TSIs but also to broader debates about local democracy in Scotland. The current community empowerment agenda highlights the democratic deficits found across institutions of local governance¹⁰ & ¹¹. In this context, TSIs must be able to demonstrate strong democratic credentials as a basis for their legitimacy in representing the sector. This is not an easy undertaking and requires innovation in third sector bodies. Co-production practices are often the foundation for how third sector organisations work with communities but they are less frequent in the interaction between third sector organisations, especially when it comes to shaping the representations made by TSIs in governance spaces such as community planning partnerships and health and social care partnerships.

This paper is organised in three sections. The first charts the evolution of TSIs, community planning and the third sector's involvement in community planning through TSIs. The second section is a case study of STRiVE, East Lothian's third sector interface, focusing on its recent initiative to strengthen third sector participation and representation in community planning. The final section discusses the learning from STRiVE's experience in the broader context of current debates about community empowerment and democratic renewal.

Third sector interfaces and community planning

The evolution of third sector interfaces in Scotland

Prior to the introduction of the TSI model, local level sector representation occurred, in part, through councils for voluntary services (CVSs), volunteer centres, local social economy partnerships and social enterprise networks. The TSI model was created by the Scottish Government in 2008 to, amongst other things, facilitate the more efficient coordination and representation of the third sector within each of Scotland's 32 local authorities. The Scottish Government identified the need for an interface organisation between the third sector and each local authority, one that mirrored the local authority's boundaries. The government specified a four-fold remit for the interface: to build third sector capacity, encourage volunteerism, support social enterprise and to build a third sector relationship with

¹⁰ Bort, E., R. McAlpine, & G. Morgan. 2012. *The silent crisis: Failure and revival in local democracy in Scotland*. Biggar: The Jimmy Reid Foundation.

¹¹ Escobar, O. *et al.* 2018. *Ibid.*

community planning. Funding was to be provided by the Scottish Government to independent third sector organisations for activities related to the four-fold remit; TSIs were free to pursue other activities and sources of funding. Decisions about the corporate form and structure were left to the organisations in each local authority area¹².

The target date for the TSI model to be in place across the country was April 2011. Between 2008 and 2011 transitional funding was provided to councils for voluntary services and volunteer centres to align their boundaries to reflect the local authority areas and to undergo negotiation and organisational restructuring to deliver on the TSI model. This shift reduced the number of organisations representing the third sector at the local level down to 32. Eleven TSIs were created through a partnership structure; 21 were created as single bodies, typically through a merger between the existing 120 councils for voluntary services and volunteer centres¹³.

Central to the re-organisation of these third sector bodies was the formalised engagement with each local authority's community planning partnership (CPP). The Scottish Government required that the arrangements for each TSI be agreed in partnership with the respective CPP. The four functions outlined by the Scottish Government were characterised as being similar to functions already undertaken by existing CVSs and volunteer centres, "but with a stronger focus on the Single Outcome Agreement¹⁴ as the key document for the CPP area."¹⁵

While this directive reduced the number of organisations at the local level, a new national organisation, Volunteer Action Scotland (VAS), was formed as the umbrella network for the newly-formed TSIs. This fundamentally changed the role of two long-standing national intermediary bodies: Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS). Both had been key in supporting local organisations; SCVO managed the Councils for Voluntary Services network, VDS managed the volunteer centres network. The new TSI model shifted the formal relationship from these national bodies to VAS.

These developments at both the local and national level created much unrest and instability in the third sector and led to a very significant remodelling of the architecture of Scotland's intermediary bodies. In 2016, the Scottish Government commissioned an evaluation of the third sector interfaces and Voluntary Action Scotland¹⁶; the report was quite critical of the sector and particularly of VAS. In late 2017 the termination of funding to VAS was announced. In November 2018 the Scottish Government published its *Third Sector Interface*

¹² Pearson, Geoff. 2010. Letter from Scottish Government on Third Sector Interfaces. [Online]. [Accessed 1 October, 2018]. Available from: <https://senscot.net/letter-from-scottish-government-on-third-sector-interfaces/>

¹³ Robert Mitchell, Third Sector Unit of the Scottish Government, personal communication, 14 November 2018

¹⁴ The Single Outcome Agreements have now been replaced by the Local Outcome Improvement Plans in the wake of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

¹⁵ Pearson, Geoff. 2009. Letter from the Public Service Reform Directorate. <https://senscot.net/the-new-third-sector-interfaces/> Accessed 1.10.2018.

¹⁶ Scottish Government. 2016. *Evaluation of Scotland's third sector interface network model and Voluntary Action Scotland*. <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/2232> Accessed 5.12.2017.

Outcome Framework, marking a shift in its relationship with TSIs.¹⁷ The framework was co-produced with the TSIs and allows for more local variation on the ground. In the ministerial introduction, Aileen Campbell, Cabinet Secretary for Community and Local Government, states “We want TSIs to be forces for change.”¹⁸

Community planning

The *Local Government in Scotland Act 2003* (LGiS) was the initial piece of legislation enshrining community planning into local governance. The Act set out the leadership role of the council to initiate and maintain a community planning process to plan and implement public services and identified a number of public sector partners as having a duty to participate. The subsequent guidance (Scottish Executive, 2004¹⁹) was generally non-specific about how community planning was to be undertaken; for example, the role of community is highlighted as requiring engagement not just consultation.

Community planning aims that still hold today are:

- “Making sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them; allied to
- A commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing better public services.”²⁰

These aims are guided by two key principles:

- “Community planning as the key over-arching partnership framework helping to coordinate other initiatives and partnerships and where necessary acting to rationalise and simplify a cluttered landscape.
- The ability of community planning to improve the connection between national priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.”²¹

The *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* has further developed community planning, building on interim arrangements such as the *Concordat between the Scottish Government and local government (2007)*²². The Act places community planning partnerships on a statutory footing and places additional duties on public bodies to plan and deliver on local outcomes and to involve community bodies in this process. Local Outcome

¹⁷ Scottish Government. 2018. *Third sector interface outcome framework*. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/third-sector-interface-outcome-framework-september-2018/> Accessed 13.12.2018.

¹⁸ Scottish Government, 2018. *Ibid.* p.3.

¹⁹ Scottish Executive. 2004. *The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 – Community Planning: Statutory Guidance*. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/47237/0028845.pdf> Accessed 5.12.2017.

²⁰ Scottish Executive. 2004. *Ibid.* p.1

²¹ Scottish Executive. 2004. *Ibid.* p.1

²² Scottish Government. 2007. *Concordat between the Scottish Government and local government*. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/923/0054147.pdf> Accessed 5.12.2017.

Improvement Plans are required, and in areas of high disadvantage a specific locality plan is required. Central to the focus of community planning is the tackling of inequalities.

The third sector and community planning

In the early days of community planning, the third sector was a marginal player. In the initial community planning pilots the third sector was not integrated into the process; in fact, none had third sector representation, leading the evaluators to recommend that future CPPs needed to involve the sector from the outset²³. However, this engagement was recommended rather than required; for example, the Statutory Guidance to the LGiS Act made a general reference to “consulting and co-operating with community and voluntary organisations, whether delivering services or representing a specific area or interest...”²⁴. Follow up guidance from the Community Planning Task Force²⁵ and the initial Audit Scotland Review simply flagged the community and voluntary sectors²⁶ as important partners, along with the private sector²⁷.

The formal engagement of the third sector was identified by the Scottish Government as an issue. In 2008 it created the Third Sector Task Group with high level representatives from across Scotland and a remit to improve third sector coordination. Community planning was part of the agenda with a stated goal that the “task group will improve and enhance the engagement” of the third sector in CPPs²⁸. In 2009 a *Joint Statement on the Relationship at Local Level between Government and the Third Sector*²⁹ was published, fashioned on the 2007 Concordat and signed by the Scottish Government, Solace, COSLA and SCVO. While the Statement focuses primarily on the technicalities of contracting, it identifies the third sector’s critical role in partnerships and specifically identifies the role of TSIs in community planning partnerships. As noted, the TSI model was created in part to link the third sector directly into CPP; this model went ‘live’ from April 2011.

The new model of TSIs formalised the relationship between the third sector and community planning. While the nature of the participation varies widely, there is now a formalised way in which the third sector engages in community planning across Scotland³⁰.

²³ COSLA and the Scottish Executive. 2000. *Community planning in Scotland: an evaluation of the Pathfinder Projects*.

²⁴ Scottish Executive. 2004. *Ibid.* p.8

²⁵ Scottish Government. 2003. *Final report of the Community Planning Task Force*.

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/47095/0026414.pdf> Accessed 5.12.2017.

²⁶ In the years since this report was published, the terminology related to the “voluntary and community sector” has been replaced with the term “third sector”. The Scottish Government currently defines the third sector as including “charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups”. <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/third-sector/> Accessed 1.10.2018.

²⁷ Audit Scotland. 2006. *Community planning: an initial review*. http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2006/nr_060616_community_planning.pdf Accessed 5.12.2017.

²⁸ Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. 2008. *Third Sector Task Group*. [Press release]. http://www.senscot.net/view_news.php?viewid=7515 Accessed 5.12.2017.

²⁹ Scottish Government. 2009. *Joint statement on the relationship at local level between government and the third sector*. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/1036/0087048.pdf> Accessed 5.12.2017.

³⁰ Escobar, O. et al. 2018. *Ibid.* p.36-37

There is evidence that the third sector is not a full partner at the community planning table³¹ & ³². Reports undertaken by Voluntary Action Scotland also reflect this as an ongoing issue; the 2014-2015 report notes:

“Although some TSIs noted improved relationships with their statutory partners, some still felt as though the third sector was not viewed as an equal partner. In some cases TSIs felt that the views of the third sector were not being fully respected, in others they suggested that the statutory partners had taken decisions with little or no involvement from the wider third sector.”³³

If the vision for making local governance more democratic is to be realised, statutory partners must be able to share power around the community planning table. The sharing of power and ownership in community planning has the potential to result in more positive outcomes for communities.

Challenges for TSIs in participation and representation

It is a significant and welcome development that the third sector has a seat at the community planning table. However, the responsibility poses many challenges for the TSIs who are charged with representing a broad and diverse sector.

These challenges were articulated through two TSI forums in 2014, both facilitated by one of the authors of this report. In 2014, 20 TSIs participated in COSLA’s [Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy](#)³⁴. In this process, weaknesses in representation were identified as a barrier to stronger local democracy, and the importance of innovative participative mechanisms to engage citizens and communities was highlighted. Although the TSIs are not elected bodies, they do play a representative role for the third sector in local governance processes.

This event paved the way for a two-day deliberative dialogue forum later in 2014 where nine TSIs came together along with Voluntary Action Scotland to create a vision for community planning from a third sector perspective³⁵. Two interconnected issues were identified: representation and influence. The challenge of effectively engaging a wide and diverse sector was seen as undermining the TSIs’ ability to claim representativeness of the sector and therefore its influence at the community planning table. As part of the TSI vision for democratic community planning it was recognised that TSIs needed to be more participative in order to be more influential. Participation required active engagement of

³¹ Escobar, O. 2014. *Strengthening local democracy in Scotland: The VAS/TSI perspective*. Edinburgh: Academy of Government and COSLA Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy.

³² Escobar, O. 2015. *Ibid.*

³³ Voluntary Action Scotland. 2015. *Collaborating for community impact: the third annual report into the activities of Scotland’s 32 third sector interfaces 2014/2015*. p 65

³⁴ Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy. 2014 *ibid*

³⁵ Escobar, O. 2015. *Ibid.*

diverse third sector voices; participation, in turn, would enable more influential representation.

In the next section, we profile a case study that explores these challenges and presents a new approach to addressing the challenges of participation, representation and influence.

Case study in participation and representation: STRiVE

TSI profile in East Lothian

STRiVE³⁶ is the operational name for Volunteer Development East Lothian (VDEL). VDEL was founded in 1999 and is a charity registered in Scotland and a company Limited by Guarantee.

STRiVE is a multi-purpose organisation providing support, learning and development opportunities for people and organisations. It provides guidance, support and training to third sector agencies and community groups in its role as the TSI for East Lothian, along with organisational support, social enterprise support, volunteering support and facilitation of roles within community planning and integrated joint board planning and strategic groups. STRiVE enables people to engage with their local community, develop and learn new skills through its Volunteering, Wellbeing and Youth & Adventure teams.

Our Vision

Involved, active and inspired communities

Our Mission

We inspire and support people and organisations to develop and become active members of their community.

Our Values

Trust – Integrity, openness and honesty

Create – Dynamic and forward thinking

Care – Passionate about what we do

Inspire – Inclusive and resourceful

STRiVE describes itself as a multi-purpose organisation; one of its roles is the third sector interface serving East Lothian. Eliot Stark, Chief Executive, was an active participant in both 2014 national forums mentioned earlier (See *Challenges for TSIs in participation and representation* above). A clear challenge crystallised for Eliot: if TSIs were to demand greater

³⁶ STRiVE website <http://strive.me.uk/our-vision-mission-and-values/> Accessed 18.10.2018.

accountability and engagement from statutory partners, how could they achieve and demonstrate a high standard of participatory governance with the third sector organisations they represent? This challenge underpinned a two-year process that resulted in fundamental change to how STRiVE engages with and represents the third sector of East Lothian.

Developing a new approach

Eliot worked with Oliver Escobar of What Works Scotland to develop a process to engage East Lothian's third sector in a discussion about its relationship with the TSI and community planning. The premise was that an external facilitator would strengthen the legitimacy of the process for STRiVE's key stakeholders, namely the third sector, the STRiVE board and the East Lothian Community Planning Partnership.

The process was framed around the interconnected challenges of participation and representation, defined as:

- **Participation** - engaging third sector organisations in discussing issues, agreeing collective positions and taking action
- **Representation** - transparency and accountability in representing the third sector in various partnerships and community forums

A two-stage workshop process was developed to engage local third sector organisations in conversations to consider:

- How should the third sector be represented, by who, where?
- When does the sector need representation and how is this decided?
- How do we ensure all third sector organisations are able to participate?
- What mechanisms should underpin this representation?

While the chief executive played the key role in initiating the process, he did not participate in the workshops. Eliot felt that third sector organisations would be freer to express a wide range of opinions if he were not a participant. Reflecting on the process, Eliot stated: "because What Works Scotland were external that allowed a different conversation" as academic facilitators could be seen as "honest brokers"³⁷.

The process was announced at STRiVE's 2015 annual conference, followed by extensive outreach to organisations across East Lothian. This included personal outreach to ensure a diversity of sectors and types of organisations in the process. Over the course of ten months, a total of 29 organisations participated in the process which comprised three deliberative workshops and an online phase using the digital engagement platform [Loomio](https://www.loomio.org/)³⁸. Two STRiVE staff participated in the sessions; their remit was to provide information and address emerging queries.

³⁷ Eliot Stark, personal communication, 12 April 2017

³⁸ <https://www.loomio.org/>

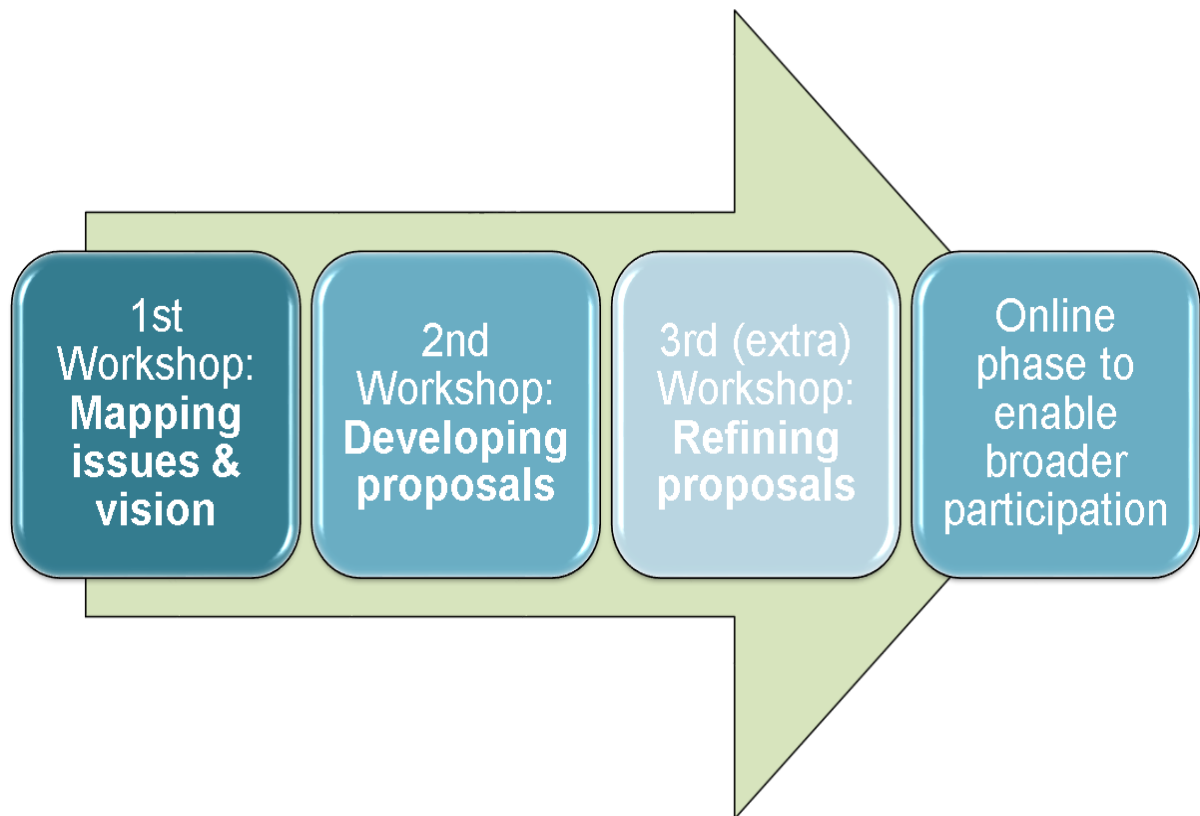


Figure 1: The participation and representation process

The workshops - promoted as ‘bacon butty blethers’ - were facilitated by Oliver Escobar and Jane Cullingworth of What Works Scotland. The first session in October 2015 engaged participants in identifying the issues and developing a vision. The initial process of mapping the issues highlighted a disconnect between the participation and representation of third sector organisations; specifically:

- Participants did not have a good understanding of the role that TSIs have in representing the third sector in community planning; many people were not aware how or where STRiVE was representing them.
- Participants identified a number of ways in which the sector’s voice is heard (community councils, local area partnerships, community planning partnerships), but little knowledge-sharing or coordination exists across these forums.
- The demands from different bodies, for example local area partnerships, to have “the community’s voice” was seen as very challenging; there are not adequate processes in place to get appropriate input, and significant expertise and resources are required to do this effectively.
- A concern was expressed that the Scottish Government’s creation of the TSI model may be limiting voice if it’s used to replace other forms of input.

After identifying key issues, participants set about creating a vision for the work STRiVE undertakes as part of its TSI mandate (it is important to reiterate that the organisation has other roles and programmes of action beyond being a TSI). The process required participants to imagine that STRiVE in 2020 was fully engaging with third sector organisations across East Lothian and effectively representing them in various governance

processes. Based on this framework, a vision was crafted. The following table shows the key themes that emerged.

Themes		Vision
Shared ownership	Voice	The voice of the third sector is heard through STRiVE and change is facilitated
	Membership	There is an engaged and identifiable membership that contributes to and benefits from STRiVE
	Clarity of purpose	STRiVE's purpose is clear and does not conflict with its membership
	Methods and process	There is clarity and transparency about how, when, where and by who the sector is represented
	Outcomes	The impact of STRiVE's representation is shared and the third sector is working effectively together

The vision that emerged for STRiVE was a TSI in which the third sector voice was collectively articulated and heard, a clear purpose was identified, the membership was engaged, representation methods and processes were transparent, and inclusive participation resulted in shared outcomes.

The second workshop in December focused on developing proposals that would help STRiVE meet the vision articulated in the first workshop. While it was hoped one workshop would be sufficient, another (third) workshop was needed to further refine the proposals; this was held in January 2016. Four proposals³⁹ were taken forward for consideration by STRiVE:

1. Create an online platform to support engagement between third sector organisations to improve coordination, discussion and representation
2. Develop a membership system for third sector participation and representation
3. Map who currently represents the third sector across East Lothian
4. Create a coordinated delegate system to improve third sector representation and impact across East Lothian

An online phase took place between May and August 2016 to enable to wider feedback on the proposals. The four options reflect the thinking process of the individuals participating in the process; within each proposal there was discussion and refinement of the ideas. The options are presented in more detail below along with the responses from both the workshops and the online phase.

³⁹ In the workshops five ideas were proposed. One proposal was that STRiVE create a separate organisation for its service delivery work because that was seen by some as being in conflict with its TSI role. This was not pursued by STRiVE.

1. Create an online platform to support engagement between third sector organisations to improve coordination, discussion and representation

A user-friendly online platform was recommended to enable ongoing dialogue between third sector organisations. The platform was seen as a way to facilitate effective coordination, discussion and the formation of collective views, thereby enabling third sector representatives to draw confidently on sector perspectives. Organisations working in the same areas would be able to connect with one another and would have online access to third sector representatives encouraging active communication across the sector.

Despite broad support for this proposal during the workshops, there was no consensus within the online stage of the process, with participants agreeing, disagreeing and abstaining in equal measure. Concern was expressed about the number of organisations with web access and expertise and potential low uptake. This was actually illustrated by the limited use of the online forum (only eight organisations participated).

2. Develop a membership system for third sector participation & representation through STRiVE

Participants recommended that STRiVE become a membership-based organisation for activities related to its TSI functions (STRiVE currently is not membership-based). It was felt that a defined membership could strengthen STRiVE's accountability to and representation of the third sector. The group identified a number of dilemmas that come with setting up a membership model including a viable and workable membership process and system, potential cost of membership, and defining different levels of membership.

There was no consensus either in the face-to-face workshops or the online forum. Concerns were raised about charging being discriminatory of smaller organisations and whether the above proposal was achievable within the TSI's capacity.

3. Map who represents the third sector across East Lothian

The group recommended mapping existing avenues of third sector input across East Lothian and creating a coordinated system for third sector organisations to state their willingness and ability to represent the sector in various forums. Specifically, the compilation of an online database was suggested through which organisations could identify their involvement in existing representative roles, as well as promoting other opportunities for third sector input into local governance processes.

Online participants were asked: Would such information be helpful to make sense of what's going on and create better coordination? Would it improve transparency? Or would it be an expensive and potentially ineffective use of resources? It was agreed by consensus, offline and online, that mapping representation would be useful and was "long overdue".

4. Create a coordinated delegate system to improve third sector representation and impact across East Lothian

This suggestion was for a radical shift from the current form of representation through the TSI to one in which by the third sector represented itself directly through a delegate system coordinated by the TSI. The term ‘delegate’ rather than ‘representative’ reflects the individual’s responsibility to gather views and report back to affected third sector organisations; a delegate has less autonomy and more accountability than a representative.

Delegates would be elected by third sector organisations at STRiVE’s annual conference and would engage actively with relevant organisations to gather input. Quarterly thematic forums were suggested as a regular opportunity for delegates to get input from, and report back to, the affected third sector organisations, in addition to the annual conference. STRiVE’s role would shift to one of supporting delegates and promoting effective communication between delegates and the third sector, as well as between delegates and the CPP. The delegate model would build on an effective mapping of the sector (see proposal 3). This model represents a fundamental shift in the role of the third sector organisations and the role of the TSI, strengthening third sector representation and increasing accountability.

There was considerable support for this proposal during the workshops. All of those responding online agreed or abstained, and indicated it was a good plan to make representation more democratic and accountable. However, sustainability was identified as a potential challenge.

Proposal	Support
Creating an online platform to support engagement between third sector organisations to improve coordination, discussion and representation	Mixed
Developing a membership system for third sector participation & representation	Mixed
Mapping who represents the third sector across East Lothian	Consensus
Developing a coordinated delegate system to improve third sector representation and impact across East Lothian	High

Moving forward with a new approach to representation

In the summer of 2016, the board of STRiVE considered the four proposals generated through the deliberative process. It supported the two complementary proposals of mapping the sector and creating a coordinated delegate model. At STRiVE’s annual conference held in September 2016, Eliot Stark presented the organisation’s

implementation plan based on the recommendations from the process⁴⁰. In a radical change to the current model, STRiVE invited the sector to put forward delegates for existing partnerships and forums, taking over STRiVE's role in representing the third sector community.

Accompanying this change, the role of STRiVE would shift to:

- facilitating and supporting the process
- creating mechanisms to enable third sector organisations to identify themselves and to elect delegates
- aiding in the development of a code of conduct
- hosting quarterly meetings
- providing training to delegates.

At the conference, a process was launched for potential delegates to put themselves forward for consideration. Third sector organisations were also encouraged to fill out information about what representation work they were currently undertaking.

The next stage of the process was securing agreement to change the existing model of representation with the East Lothian Partnership (the local community planning partnership) and the East Lothian Integrated Joint Board (the local health and social care partnership). A report outlining the proposed change was presented by Eliot Stark at the October 2016 East Lothian Partnership board. The report specifies that the delegate mechanism will be used when a sector-wide view is required.⁴¹

While there was support from the East Lothian Partnership board for the delegate model, there was resistance to having STRiVE step down from the board because of their role in delivering services (some on behalf of the council). An agreement was secured at the June 2017 Partnership board meeting,⁴² a process that took nine months. This negotiation highlights some of the challenges encountered in bringing third sector organisations into local governance arrangements, as well as the repercussions of government-designed models that intervene in the existing mandates and roles of third sector organisations. In this particular case, the TSI model introduced by the Scottish Government in 2008 resulted in the merging of existing organisations; this in turn created an organisation that had a mandate to represent the third sector as well as being a service delivery organisation.

The compromise reached was that, in addition to a delegate from the third sector, STRiVE would continue to sit on the East Lothian Partnership and the Safe and Vibrant Communities

⁴⁰ See STRiVE website for report on the process: Escobar, O. and Cullingworth, J. 2016. *Third sector participation and representation in East Lothian*. <http://strive.me.uk/news/third-sector-participation-representation-materials/> Accessed 22.2.2019.

⁴¹ East Lothian Partnership Meeting Minutes, October 26, 2016. https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5871/disestablished_committee_-_east_lothian_partnership Accessed 17.12.2018.

⁴² East Lothian Partnership Meeting Minutes, June 28, 2017. https://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/5873/disestablished_committee_-_east_lothian_partnership Accessed 17.12.2018.

Partnership. The process of securing the delegate system through the East Lothian Integrated Joint Board (IJB) and its Strategic Planning Group was a smooth one and did not require negotiation.

As a result of the new model, delegates from third sector organisations now sit on the⁴³:

- East Lothian Partnership
- Connected Economy Group
- Children’s Strategic Partnership
- East Lothian Integrated Joint Board
- East Lothian Integrated Joint Board Strategic Planning Group

The delegate approach to representation

The approved delegate approach has two strands – elected delegates and specialist delegates. Elected delegates are elected annually at STRiVE’s conference and sit on various partnerships. Specialist delegates come from a pool of volunteers who have expertise in a particular area and then represent the sector on short-life, one-off or specialist groups of the governance partnerships named above. A role description exists for delegates, and positions are for one year. Delegates have to commit to a code of conduct; this code is adapted from the East Lothian Partnership’s code. As part of their role delegates produce a summary of meetings that they attend.

STRiVE’s role is to facilitate the involvement of third sector delegates across the CPP and other partnerships and the communication between delegates, community planning and the wider third sector. It is also STRiVE’s role to ensure the transparency and accuracy of delegate summaries that are publicly available.

Further research will be required to assess the actual impact of this new model on the third sector, the TSI and local governance processes. The next section reflects on the insights from the participation and representation process at STRiVE.

⁴³ Delegates also sat on the Safe and Vibrant Communities Partnership and the Resilient People Partnership. Since that time there has since been a restructuring resulting in the removal of these two partnerships. As part of the restructuring, the Sustainable Economy Partnership was replaced with a Connected Economy Group.

Insights from STRiVE's participation and representation Initiative

In this section we consider some of the insights from the process.

The current system of third sector representation struggles to be effective and democratic

TSIs are an important player in local governance processes; they were described by the Scottish Government at the end of 2017 as providing "... strong coherent and cohesive representation of the third sector with clear links to Community Planning Partnerships"⁴⁴. The challenges and weaknesses of this representation role were highlighted through the work with STRiVE and underscore the strong interrelationship between participation and representation.

Firstly, the traditional model suggests that there is a 'third sector voice' that can be channeled through the TSI. In the *Reimagining Community Planning* report, we captured the problematic nature of this assumption stating, "In such a diverse sector the expectation that it may 'speak with one voice' seems not only unrealistic but also potentially detrimental"⁴⁵. The TSI faces a challenge of representation that is very different from statutory partners that speak from an organisational perspective (such as the NHS). There are many third sector voices; this is part of the sector's strength as a platform for local action and democratic engagement.

A related concern about the TSI's role in community planning is that the model may be limiting voices if it replaces other forms of input. There was some cynicism expressed by organisations that the model was an easy way to check the box of third sector engagement.

Secondly, the STRiVE initiative revealed that third sector organisations in East Lothian were generally unaware of the TSI's role in representing them. It is most likely that this dynamic between the TSI and their local third sector organisations is reflected in other parts of Scotland. The TSI model was created by the Scottish Government, ostensibly to ensure effective and efficient representation of the third sector. While this form of representation may be efficient, it cannot be effective if the organisations being represented are unaware of this fact.

Thirdly, it was clear from the STRiVE experience that many organisations are engaged in different forms of representation across East Lothian (beyond the TSI), but there was no knowledge-sharing or coordination across these forums. Participants expressed concern about the demands on them to get "the community's voice" in these forums; this reflects

⁴⁴ Scottish Government - Third Sector Interfaces. <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/15300/Localism> Accessed 11.12.2017. Note – the description of the TSIs has been updated to "Third sector interfaces (TSIs) provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector within local areas. There is a TSI in each local authority area in Scotland."

⁴⁵ Escobar, O. 2015. *Ibid.* p.3

the same challenge experienced by the TSI in community planning. Organisations identified the lack of processes in place to get appropriate input and felt that significant expertise and resources were required to do this effectively.

While the opportunity for the third sector to sit on CPPs across Scotland is welcome, this mechanism cannot engage the diversity of third sector voices unless CPPs strengthen their processes of community engagement and democratic governance^{46 & 47}.

Local third sector organisations are keen to develop new processes to strengthen participation and representation

The STRiVE initiative engaged a total of 29 organisations over a period of ten months. People from the sector had many ideas to contribute and were willing to commit their time and energy to the process. Furthermore, individuals were willing to put themselves forward to be delegates for the sector. The organisations involved were generally small, locally-based organisations.

Democratisation can be initiated from the top

It is an interesting juxtaposition that a process about democratic innovation should be initiated by the chief executive of an organisation rather than from the grassroots. This is not unusual in the field of democratic innovation, where change often depends on buy-in from gatekeepers in senior positions. Eliot Stark initiated an engagement exercise that contained a high degree of risk and uncertainty for STRiVE. The end result has been a fundamental shift in the role of STRiVE in community planning (though not as fundamental as STRiVE proposed). The power of representation is now largely in the hands of third sector organisations rather than the TSI. When Stark addressed STRiVE's annual conference he stated: "The voice will be through the delegates... we are not interpreting voice; the voice is your voice. Our role truly becomes facilitative rather than representative."

The end result has been a shift that arguably reduces the influence of STRiVE. STRiVE is sharing power in order to experiment with a system of representation that is more strongly rooted in the community of third sector organisations. That an organisation would work towards removing itself from influential committees is a demonstration of a strong belief in the third sector community. While the chief executive's role in this process was key, it is also important to recognise the importance of STRiVE's board in supporting the recommendations. The shift in the organisation's role was a significant one and reflects a strong commitment to local engagement. It also demonstrates the importance of new forms of public service leadership⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Escobar, O. 2015, *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ Escobar O. *et al*. 2018. *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ See for example this What Works Scotland brief about new forms of public service leadership: <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/policy-briefing-public-service-leadership-what-works/>

Bringing third sector organisations into local governance requires negotiation

The majority of representatives in community planning partnerships are from the public sector, although they have often featured some level of representation from the third and community sectors⁴⁹ & ⁵⁰. This is due to a combination of factors, including issues of staff capacity as well as the formal allocation of statutory responsibilities. Although it is now a recognised practice that TSIs sit on CPPs, they are not statutory bodies and there is no language in the *Community Empowerment Act* that specifically identifies them or requires their participation⁵¹. The TSIs' involvement in local planning structures is outlined in the *Third Sector Interface Outcome Framework*⁵² which was published by the Scottish Government in November 2018.

Negotiation is required to bring third sector organisations into these arrangements in meaningful ways. Challenges exist in part because they are fundamentally different types of organisations, with different histories, complex relationships with their constituencies, and less capacity than their statutory partners. In the case of STRiVE and the East Lothian Partnership, a negotiation was required that reconciled the TSI's dual role as an interface and a service delivery organisation. This negotiation highlights some of the challenges encountered in bringing third sector organisations into local governance arrangements, as well as the implications of government-designed models for third sector organisations. In this particular case, the TSI model introduced by the Scottish Government in 2008 resulted in the merging of existing organisations; this in turn created an organisation that had a mandate to represent the third sector and deliver services. This dual role creates tensions both at a governance level as well as at a community level where third sector organisations may question the ability of an organisation to be both a voice of the sector and a delivery organisation.

STRiVE's experience in East Lothian illustrates that it can take time to negotiate new ways of working, especially when the TSI plays a dual role as both a platform for representation and a service delivery organisation. It is important to ensure transparency when delineating the governance and operations of these two distinct functions of a TSI. In the case of STRiVE, a delegate system was developed to enable participation within, and representation outside, the third sector. TSI staff may still have to play a role in partnerships where they have direct responsibility for service delivery. Therefore, any reforms to a TSI must establish clear remits and responsibilities to avoid confusion that may undermine their different roles as community planning partners.

⁴⁹ Escobar *et al.* 2018. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Weakley, S., & O. Escobar. 2018. *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The Community Empowerment Act states that community planning partners must "participate with any community body in such a way as to enable that body to participate in community planning" (*Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, 2015*. Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament, Part 4.3)

⁵² Scottish Government 2018 *Third Sector Interface: Outcome Framework*
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/third-sector-interface-outcome-framework-september-2018/>

The commitment to subsidiarity in CPPs is a qualified one

Despite the stated aim of community planning to “make sure people and communities are genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services which affect them”⁵³, research about CPPs across Scotland reflects that there is often a disconnect between the philosophy of community planning and the actual practice of it^{54 & 55}. Making sure that TSIs are able to bring third sector voices into the partnership process is paramount to support the substantial contribution of third sector organisations to effective public services. Therefore CPPs will benefit from supporting efforts to improve participation and representation in the local TSI.

What is clear is that changing systems is incremental work. The delegate system developed in East Lothian is an example of the kind of change that tries to infuse democratic dynamics into existing community planning, a theme highlighted in *Reimagining Community Planning in Scotland*⁵⁶. TSIs should be supported to develop as participatory and deliberative spaces according to the priorities of the organisations in their network so that they can provide more effective and democratic representation for the diversity third sector.

There is strong democratic potential in the TSI being a facilitator and an enabler, rather than a representative

TSIs are potentially well placed to act as networks and platforms that enable third sector organisations to mobilise, deliberate, and act together on issues of shared concern. The legitimacy of a TSI depends on its capacity to enable participation by the diversity of voices in the sector. In this way, legitimacy can turn into influence in local governance if a TSI can demonstrate broad sector engagement in shaping collective priorities and action.

This means recasting the role of TSIs from being expected to *provide* sector representation, to being expected to *enable* sector representation. This report has illustrated how STRiVE is working in this direction. STRiVE’s role is shifting from *being* the interface to *facilitating* the interface. This entails devolving the power to represent the third sector through an open participatory process. To be clear, it is unrealistic to expect the local third sector to speak with one voice on everything. More feasible is to recognise that there are key areas of shared concern that warrant shared action, and here is where the TSI can act as a facilitator that creates space for this to happen. As seen in the case of STRiVE, this requires investment in mechanisms that enable participation and deliberation as a basis for representation.

⁵³ Scottish Executive. 2004. *Ibid.* p.1

⁵⁴ Escobar *et al.* 2018. *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Weakley, S. and Escobar, O. 2018. *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Escobar, O. 2015. *Ibid.*

Conclusion

STRiVE's decision to pilot a new model of representation is certainly a bold one. Third sector organisations in East Lothian now have a key role to play in developing, testing and refining these new ideas in practice. There will be much to learn from this experiment in East Lothian over time – for practitioners and researchers alike. It is an example of devolution in practice, seeking to counter current democratic deficits in the third sector by developing new ways of improving participation and representation through TSIs.

However, the challenges of improving the democratic credentials of TSIs should not be underestimated. As the case explored in this report illustrates, there are internal and external challenges. Internally, it requires the leadership and activism to question the received model of TSIs and open it up for scrutiny and reform from the grassroots. This may entail, as in the case of STRiVE, letting go of the 'gatekeeping' role and contesting the assumption that TSIs can legitimately speak for the sector while lacking democratic engagement across the sector. Externally, it requires that partners in existing governance structures (i.e. CPPs, IJBs) understand that TSIs are there to serve their grassroots and thus need leeway to organise themselves as they see fit as long as it helps to improve how they operate and contribute.

We are not arguing that there is a one-size-fits-all that can be imported across the country. Each TSI has its own particular history and context and must find their own way of improving the democratic quality of third sector representation. TSIs like STRiVE are taking a considerable risk by opening up space for experimentation. The point of this case study is not to present a model that can be applied everywhere, but to gather learnings from the experience of a TSI currently doing trailblazing work.

The point is to reimagine the role that TSIs can play in local democracy and governance. A TSI that works more democratically can help to enable better representation of the variety of voices in the local third sector. This, in turn, increases its legitimacy and scope for influence. It is harder for other local actors and institutions to disregard a TSI that can demonstrate strong democratic credentials. Stronger third sector representation can, in turn, help to improve local governance and outcomes for the communities it serves.