



## **Collaborate Event Report**

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# **What Works Scotland & West Dunbartonshire Community Planning Partnership – Community-Led Action Planning Report**

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**A report from a local event held as part of a process of  
Collaborative Action Research within the What Works  
Scotland programme of support for public service reform**

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**Claire Bynner**



**What Works Scotland** (WWS) aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

We are working with Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services (Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) to:

- learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability

WWS brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, with partners from a range of local authorities and:

- Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Healthcare Improvement Scotland
- Improvement Service
- Inspiring Scotland
- IRISS (Institution for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
- Joint Improvement Team
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Education for Scotland
- SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

This is one of a series of papers published by What Works Scotland to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates to the **WWS Collaborative Action Research workstream** and the **WWS Community Engagement and Capacity Building workstream**. This report has been written for the purposes of sharing the outcomes from a local event held with community engagement practitioners in West Dunbartonshire. This publication may be of interest to WWS partners and others with an interest in Collaborative Action Research and/ or Community Engagement and Capacity Building (CE).

**Claire Bynner** is a WWS Research Associate based at the University of Glasgow, working closely with the West Dunbartonshire Case Study Area partners.

This report was possible thanks to the community engagement partners and practitioners in West Dunbartonshire who contributed their energy, creativity and expertise to the Community-led Action Planning Development Day, on which this report is based.

Special thanks to the participants in the Action Research Interviews: **Murdo Cameron** of Balloch and Haldane Community Council, **Kaela Scott**, East Lothian CPP and **Suzanne Brodie**, East Ayrshire Council; and to **Alan Deans** and **Colin Smith** of the Communities Team for their work on the Action Research Interviews. **Alan Deans** is thanked for his assistance with writing up and video editing and also **Billy Joe McLaughlin** for his help with video editing.

The Community-led Action Planning Development Day was organised by WWS in collaboration with the following members of the Communities Team within Corporate and Community Planning at West Dunbartonshire Council: **Suzanne Greer, Anne Clegg, Sonya Peddie, Alan Deans, Colin Smith**.

The following WWS team members supported the planning and facilitation of the event: **Oliver Escobar, Kenneth Gibb, Hayley Bennett, Richard Brunner, Jane Cullingworth, James Henderson**.

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You can learn more about WWS here: <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk>

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### Abbreviations in this report

CPP:	Community Planning Partnership
C-AP:	Community-led Action Planning
CAR:	Collaborative Action Research
WD:	West Dunbartonshire
WWS:	What Works Scotland
SCDC:	Scottish Community Development Centre

## Background

At the heart of the What Works Scotland initiative is a programme of Collaborative Action Research (CAR) that is being taken forward with representatives from four case study Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs). The aim of this work is to build capacity and capability in the use of evidence to support local improvement projects and to capture evidence from practice as to what works in achieving public service reform.

West Dunbartonshire is one of four WWS national case study areas. WWS have been working with the local community planning team to develop collaborative action research projects to address local priorities for public service reform. The early preparatory phase of our work examined the background to a new neighbourhood approach to community planning in West Dunbartonshire, known locally as 'Your Community'. This approach aligns to the post-Christie Commission agenda for public service reform that is reflected in forms of community planning that are more responsive to local needs and community assets. 'Your Community' in West Dunbartonshire seeks to strengthen and enable community-led approaches to action planning. This local programme of public service reform was identified as a key priority for WWS in West Dunbartonshire. The purpose of this document is to share the learning and findings from a local event on community-led action planning as part of the WWS Collaborative Action Research process.

## WWS Collaborative Action Research

Figure 1 summarises the WWS Collaborative Action Research process and the three phases that comprise each research cycle.

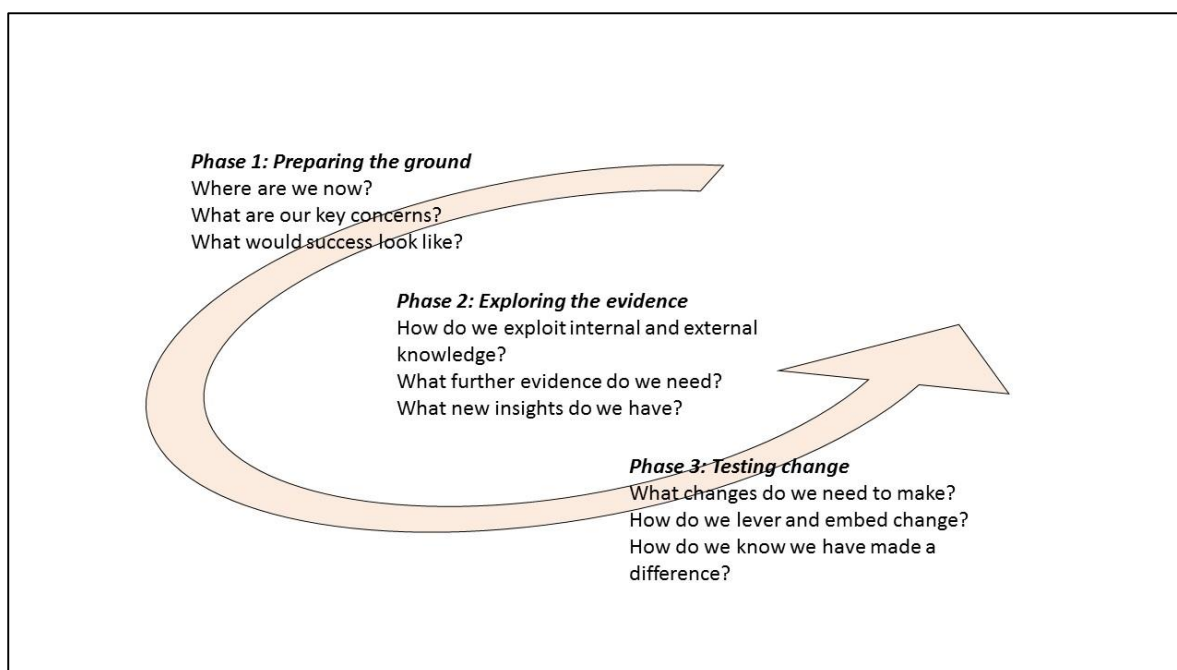


Figure 1 - The WWS Collaborative Action Research Cycle

Phase 1 of the WWS Collaborative Action Research cycle entailed Preparing the Ground through building a shared understanding of the local context/ background and key concerns in order to prioritise areas for research. Officers in the West Dunbartonshire community planning team identified community-led action planning as a key area for Collaborative Action Research.

The following research aim for the collaborative work with WWS was agreed:

To research and design a meaningful and effective process of dialogue and participation in community led action planning (C-AP)

Phase 2 of the WWS Collaborative Action Research process involves Exploring the Evidence. From June – December 2015 WWS activity in West Dunbartonshire has focussed on gathering and analysing evidence. Two methods of evidence gathering were used:

1. Action Research Interviews conducted by local officers using a method of narrative interviewing
2. A Community-led Action Planning Development Day with local community engagement practitioners and community planning partners

The C-AP Development Day event was planned as part of the WWS Collaborative Research Process. A key element of the WWS approach to CAR (Collaborative Action Research) is the organisation of a series of ‘collaborative retreats’ at a national and local level. Collaborative retreats are intensive events for representatives from the case study partners and WWS staff. National retreats are usually residential whereas ‘home’ retreats are shorter and are locally co-designed and produced. Whilst the national retreats are targeted at all WWS case study areas and focus on sharing learning across different contexts, the focus of the local ‘home’ retreats is on developing local action research projects and responding to local needs.

The focus and design of ‘home retreats’ differs from one WWS case study to another in response to the local context. In West Dunbartonshire the opportunity to organise a WWS home retreat was used as a ‘Development Day’ reflecting a desire from local partners to use this event both to increase the knowledge and understanding of practitioners as well as an opportunity to gather evidence. The event was planned to engage a wide range of practitioners from across the CPP including representatives from the public and third sectors.

## Format of the Development Day

The following objectives for the C-AP Development Day were agreed with the members of the WDC Communities Team:

1. To increase understanding of the 'Your Community' approach to planning services at a neighbourhood level in West Dunbartonshire
2. To improve knowledge of the Community Empowerment Act and its implications in relation to current and new practice.
3. To share and generate innovative ideas on planning, facilitating & supporting Community-led Action Planning
4. To build on existing connections and discover opportunities for collaboration with other practitioners

Organising community engagement and citizen participation in the design of public services takes considerable work and relies on skilful practitioners. The focus of this event was to invite the participation of these practitioners working in West Dunbartonshire whose everyday work involves fostering or enabling community engagement processes. There are many terms used to describe community engagement practitioners in the policy literature including: process workers; facilitators; deliberative practitioners; public and community dialogue workers; network-builders and innovators.

30 participants attended the C-AP Development Day including members of the WDC Communities Team (and in addition several WWS team members). Most participants were employees of West Dunbartonshire Council, however, there was also representation from local voluntary sector organisations including housing and youth organisations, the leisure company, the local Health and Social Care Partnership and Skills Development Scotland.

The C-AP Development Day took place on Thursday 29 October 2015 at Clydebank Town Hall. The programme for the day is included in Appendix 1. The event was originally planned for a full day but due to unexpected pressures on staff time the event had to be shortened to half-a-day. A substantial amount of information was covered and data gathered in a relatively short period of time. The success of the day is thanks to the work of members of the Communities Team who worked hard to plan a balanced and engaging programme, and to the hard work and insightful contributions of the participants that attended on the day. Indeed one participant arrived at the event by accident but found the presentations so interesting she decided to stay!

The first session opened with an overview of Your Community from Amanda Coulthard, Community Planning Manager for West Dunbartonshire, followed by Dr Oliver Escobar of What Works Scotland who gave a presentation on *The Scottish Policy Context and the Community Empowerment Act*. This was followed by a question and answer session. Participants were shown brief clips from video recordings of *Action Research Interviews* conducted by members of the WDC Communities Team followed by a presentation from Anne Clegg, WDC Communities Officer, on the preliminary findings from the research.

After a coffee break participants took part in Session Two which began with table discussions on the question: *What Works in Community-led Action Planning?* A meta-planning<sup>1</sup> tool was used to draw out the key conditions that participants believed would be necessary to support community-led approaches (see Figure 3). This session was followed by a *Co-design Workshop* where participants considered a real example of neighbourhood in West Dunbartonshire and discussed the methods, information and processes needed to develop community-led action planning. The event was closed by Amanda Coultard, Community Planning Manager and followed by a networking lunch.



Figure 2 Meta-planning with Sticky Wall

In relation to research ethics and use of data, the WWS team asked participants at the C-AP Development Day for general consent for WWS staff to take notes and to use the material recorded on the day to write-up the findings and learning. This informed consent included agreement that WWS could use the material captured as part of a bank of data that WWS may use for the purposes of learning and writing about public service reform. Individuals will not be identified in this writing without a separate process of individual consent. Given the nature of the data being gathered, participants were not asked to sign individual research consent forms. Participants were offered the opportunity to raise any issues or concerns with this approach during the event to Oliver Escobar or Claire Bynner. No issues or concerns were raised.

The WWS team used a range of methods on the day to capture the evidence and learning including: coloured cards for meta-planning; flipchart records; completed worksheets; other notes and recordings from table discussions; and evaluation forms. Following the event the

<sup>1</sup> Meta-planning is a facilitation technique for group work that helps to map key issues and cluster them into themes, while giving everyone an equal chance to participate see [www.beltanenetwork.org](http://www.beltanenetwork.org)

raw data was typed up and organized into themes for analysis. The collated data from each session is included in a separate Workbook file.

The remaining sections of this report present summaries of the findings from each session during the event followed by learning from evaluations and conclusions.

## The National and Local Policy Context

Oliver Escobar is the lead academic on the WWS workstream: *Community Engagement and Capacity Building* and he is involved in a range of initiatives to develop participatory democracy in Scotland including advice to the Scottish Government on parts of the guidance on the Community Empowerment Act and the re-drafting of the National Standards for Community Engagement with the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). In Oliver's presentation on The Scottish Policy Context and the Community Empowerment Act he described community engagement and citizen participation as 'integral to the Scottish Approach to policy-making and public service delivery'. The following are some examples of legislation, policy reports and policy commissions that support community engagement and citizen participation in Scotland:

- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Integration of Health and Social Care Services
- Christie Commission on Future Delivery of Public Services 2011
- Audits of Community Planning Partnerships (2011, 2013), Review of Community Planning (2012), National Community Planning Group (2012- )
- National Planning Framework 3
- Parliamentary Local Government Committee (2013, 2014)
- COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy (2014)
- Community Councils Short Life Working Group (2011)

**Community engagement and citizen participation are integral to the Scottish Approach to policy-making and public service delivery**

The Community Empowerment Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act on 24 July 2015. The overall purpose of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is to help empower community bodies by strengthening their voices in decisions about public services and through increasing community ownership or control of land and buildings. (Scottish Government 2016) The text of the Act can be found on the Legislation.gov.uk website at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents/enacted>

In relation to community planning, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has a number of important implications:

- The Act formalises CPPs as a governance structure and places new duties on a range of partners



- It places a stronger focus on ‘improving outcomes’
- It requires CPPs to develop Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIP) replacing Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)
- CPPs will be required to divide the area of the local authority into smaller areas and to produce locality plans
- The Act allows community bodies to make formal requests to participate in decision making processes in order to improve local outcomes
- More generally, the Act increases the emphasis on community participation in public decision-making

Further information on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and its implementation can be found in the Scottish Community Development Centre’s guidance and from the Scottish Community Alliance <http://www.localpeopleleading.co.uk>

In relation to public participation and inequalities, Oliver argued that the aspiration for a ‘Fairer Scotland’ (<http://fairer.scot>) may require greater consideration of the type of community engagement activities community planning partnerships are seeking to facilitate. There is a need for greater critical awareness of the interests promoted by different choices in community engagement strategies and methods.

Oliver’s research highlights three significant challenges in organising community engagement shown in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3 Key challenges in organising community engagement processes (Source: Escobar 2014b)

Community-led action planning is central to the ‘Your Community’ neighbourhood approach to community planning in West Dunbartonshire. Following Oliver’s presentation, Amanda Coultard, Community Planning Manager explained the key objectives of Your Community.

Key objectives of Your Community West Dunbartonshire:

- To improve the coordination and responsiveness of local services with an emphasis on efficiency
- To support the development of empowered and engaged communities in the long term, active in the design and delivery of services to the area, building community capacity and infrastructure

The model was developed following research into place-based models in other areas, a Steering group was established in 2015 and a pilot carried out in one area within the authority. The approach is now being rolled out across the 17 in West Dunbartonshire on a phased basis.

The key stages of the model are:

- producing a neighbourhood profile, gathering information via surveys, walkabouts, exiting data
- development of community-led action plans in each area
- delivering the action plan
- Evaluation and review

Key to the model are: collaborative working across services and partners, community engagement, communication and publicity, identifying what services can do and what communities can do also. Services are now developing new ways of working to respond to issues raised in neighbourhoods. However for a truly community led approach it is essential for the community to have a key role in identifying the priorities and where **they** can take action to improve their area

## **Community Councils**

In the Q&A the role of Community Councils in widening citizen participation was raised. Oliver explained that although Community Councils in Scotland are intended to be the most local tier of democracy, in many localities their potential as a vehicle for community engagement remains unfulfilled. This has been illustrated in various reviews and publications<sup>2</sup>. The potential role of Community Councils in strengthening local democracy in Scotland is discussed in a report from Escobar (2014). The potential for Community Councils in West Dunbartonshire to play a greater role in promoting and widening citizen participation in West Dunbartonshire is an area that could be examined further through the development of the 'Your Community' model.

## **Elected members**

The role of locally elected members in supporting community-led approaches was also raised. Local Councillors in West Dunbartonshire have expressed their support for community-led action plans and are keen to see these published as soon as possible, yet they may not be aware of the nature and types of processes involved in community-led action planning. The implementation of Your Community could provide an opportunity for

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<sup>2</sup> Scottish Office, 1999; Community Council Short Life Working Group, 2012; Scottish Government, 2013; Thomson *et al.*, 2012; Bort *et al.*, 2012

discussion on the role of Councillors in creating the conditions that are most likely to encourage local people to take part.

In conclusion, the current policy climate in Scotland seems favourable to developing more local and participatory forms of democracy. The Christie Commission Report placed community engagement and asset-based approaches at the forefront of a new era of public service reform. Both the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act and the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act signal a shift towards increasing community engagement and citizen participation through neighbourhood/locality planning. This new phase of public service reform is being developed and implemented in West Dunbartonshire through 'Your Community'.

**Key issues for further discussion and consideration from this section:**

1. What are the implications of the Community Empowerment Act for the development of community-led action planning?
2. Whose interests does community engagement serve and how can community-led approaches contribute to a 'Fairer Scotland'?
3. What is the role of representative democracy and local Councillors in supporting and promoting community-led approaches?
4. What is the potential role of community councils and other community groups in community-led action planning?

## **Community-led Action Planning – Findings from Action Research Interviews**

In October 2015, the WWS Research Associate, Claire Bynner, designed and delivered training in Narrative Interviewing for members of the Communities Team undertaking action research interviews. (For further details of this training please contact [claire.bynner@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:claire.bynner@glasgow.ac.uk)). Community Development Workers Alan Deans and Colin Smith of the Communities Team arranged and undertook Action Research using the narrative interviewing method to investigate different approaches and perspectives on community-led action planning. Three interviews were conducted and recorded on video including an interview with the Chair of a local community council and interviews with community engagement / community planning officers from two Scottish local authority areas.

The following section summarises the learning from the action research interviews. Please see the References section for web-links to further information on each of these approaches.

### **Balloch Community-led Action Plan**

In 2012 a Community Action Plan (CAP) steering group was set up with representatives from the Community Council, local businesses, youth services and active community members

representing the community as a whole. This community action plan has been developed through extensive consultation with the wider Balloch and Haldane community. A random selection of residences across the community were given the opportunity to complete a household survey with additional forms available from the local library. In addition to this, a number of stakeholder interviews were carried out by the dedicated Community Agent - Ann Gillen. Finally the community were given the opportunity to view and comment on those recommendations made through a community open event held in the St Kessog's Church hall.

Murdoch Cameron MBE, Chairman of Balloch and Haldane Community Council described the process of developing a Community-led Action Plan as 'not an easy task'. It took 18 months to develop a vision for what local people would like to achieve for the village of Balloch.

The Community Action Plan is reviewed every six months by the Balloch & Haldane Community Council along with representatives from other community organisations. An annual delivery plan is developed which details how the priorities for the coming year are to be tackled. The Community Council maintain this delivery plan as part of their twice yearly Community Action Plan review.

For more information see <http://www.ballochhaldanecc.org.uk/>

Key achievement:

- community councillors and other organisations worked well together on a committee and local residents were able to communicate their thoughts and ideas to officers in local services

Key learning points:

- The process can be hard work but the potential benefits offset the time and effort involved

## East Lothian

In East Lothian the CPP took a strategic approach to community-led action planning and developed their process through six ward-based Area Partnerships. Each Area Partnership has between 20 and 25 members; including all ward Councillors and community based representatives from Community Councils, Tenants & Residents groups, Parent Councils, Pupil Councils and other networks representing, for example, local business, faith groups, sports associations, youth organisations, heritage groups or older people's services, depending on the needs and make-up of the particular ward area. No officers are members of the Area Partnerships and, although officers regularly attend meetings to provide information and guidance, they have no formal role in decision-making. For the first year however each Area Partnership was chaired by a senior manager appointed by the CPP to give the groups time to consolidate and grow into their new role before they elected a community based Chairperson.

The first priority for each Area Partnership was to develop a community-led Area Plan, aligned to the *The East Lothian Plan – Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) 2013–23* but focused on what would make the most difference locally. A social and demographic analysis of each area provided a starting point for developing these plans allowing statistical evidence of local need to be balanced with local intelligence. While initially the process developed a ‘massive wish list’ in each Area, Local Community Planning Officers facilitated a process of negotiation and deliberation with members and service providers over several months to refine these into agreed action plans. In 2015/16 East Lothian Council devolved a budget of £1.25 million across the 6 Area Partnerships to be used to deliver on Actions identified in their Area Plans and Area Managers were appointed to manage this budget and co-ordinate the implementation of agreed projects.

**Key achievement:**

- The process brought wide networks of people together to make deliverable decisions in a different way and resourced them to take a wider perspective than that of just their own group.

**Key learning points:**

- The importance of management and elected member buy in
- The need for financial resources and human resources to facilitate and co-ordinate the process e.g. Local Community Planning Officers, resources for wider engagement and Area Managers
- The importance of allowing time to build relationships with the people involved in the process and develop their understanding of the role they are being asked to play
- That devolving resources and actual decision making responsibilities to the groups gave participants confidence that their time and input was valued and taken seriously by the CPP

**East Ayrshire**

The approach in East Ayrshire focused strongly on the leadership of local communities. The process began by inviting community councils to work with other groups and organisations in the area to develop a community-led plan. The focus was on involving residents who were not already actively participating in community groups. A Steering Group of local groups was established and the group followed the East Ayrshire Community Led Action Planning process based on the Community Futures Programme designed and supported by STAR Development Group. Stage one involved a simple survey delivered to every household carried out by community volunteers. The volunteers also targeted local schools with a children and young people’s survey. Volunteers returned to collect the survey responses until they had achieved the target 40% return rate for surveys delivered to households. Stage 2 of the process involved a community event where local people were invited to learn about the results of the survey and to prioritise actions by voting for

proposals. Local organisations attended the event with stalls to provide information and tables in the centre where their prioritisation process took place. 12 Community Workers are involved in supporting the process across East Ayrshire providing training to steering group members. Community Events are run by community members with support from their Community Worker. The outcome is the development of 5 year Community-led Action Plans.

**Key achievement:**

- Increasing the membership of local organisations and working better together through engaging with the local authority and other partners and seeing sustainable change

**Key learning points:**

- Community-led action planning can be a process which supports communities to do things for themselves
- What makes the process work is the training provided to local communities
- Listen, support, and be solution focussed. Rather than saying that something cannot be done, seek other ways to achieve results

## Meta planning: What Works in Community-led Action Planning?

**'Community led'** refers to projects, programmes, services, activities where individuals, groups or organisations within defined geographical neighbourhoods have a high degree of power and/or control over the aims, design, or delivery of activities (CRESR 2015).

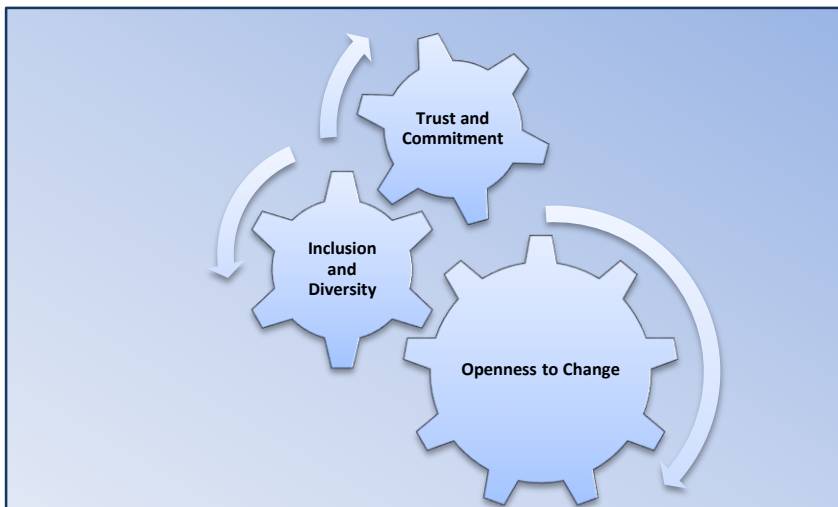
Figure 4 Definition of 'community-led'

In this meta-planning session participants were asked to consider what a community-led approach to delivering services to local areas would look like and the conditions that would support community led approaches. Comments were recorded on 95 coloured cards and five 'top' conditions were identified using a process of clustering the cards on a 'sticky wall'. This process was begun during the event and completed post event due to the limitations of time. The five themes are ordered below based on how many cards were clustered under each theme.

Five conditions to support community-led action planning in West Dunbartonshire:

1. **Values and Attitudes**
2. **Resources**
3. **Methods and skills**
4. **Planning mechanisms**
5. **Communication**

## 1. Values and Attitudes



### *Openness to change*

Participants gave a strong emphasis to the need for attitudes and values on the part of service providers that reflected a greater 'openness to change', a 'willingness to learn', a 'willingness to compromise' and the motivation to 'listen and work with the community'. Closely related to this 'openness to change' was the importance of 'positive engagement' and the use of community engagement methods that are 'welcoming and enjoyable'.

### *Inclusion and Diversity*

In relation to Values and Attitudes participants also highlighted the need for community-led approaches to be underpinned by 'inclusion', 'respect for human rights' and processes that involve 'the whole community not just the loudest voice'. Notes from one table highlighted the concern that individuals or groups in communities who described themselves as 'representing' the community were in practice only representing themselves. The phrase used by one group was 'representation without consultation'. It is important to hear the 'voices of community members whose views are not normally heard' and to seek a greater diversity of views. One comment argued that 'the language of 'community' may not be helpful'. Another suggested that there is a need to 'change the perception of who the community are' to encompass a wider set of stakeholders including 'West Dunbartonshire

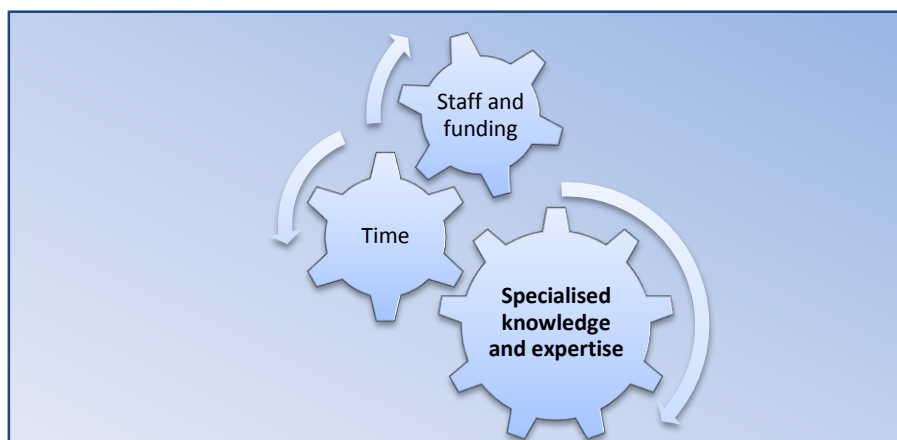
Council, partners and employers’. This wider conceptualisation of ‘community’ might help to break down the perceived division between service providers and service users.

### *Trust and Commitment*

A third and related aspect of Values and Attitudes was the emphasis participants gave to the need to ‘build trust’ and gain ‘commitment and buy-in’ to the approach. Commitment and buy-in to community-led action planning is needed from both service providers and communities. The repeated use of the words ‘trust’ and ‘honesty’ by participants suggests that in the past local services in West Dunbartonshire may have been perceived as defensive or not entirely transparent in their interactions with local residents. In relation to public services, participants sought ‘buy-in from other council or public services, not just community planning’ and ‘management buy-in’. Participants proposed that ‘clear agreements’ and / or ‘partnership agreements (signed)’ could provide a way of substantiating the commitment from services. Responses stressed the importance of a ‘genuine’ commitment suggesting that commitment to community-led approaches can be merely superficial. There may be a relationship between the level of trust and commitment to the process and the extent to which participants believe that there is potential for the process to have a real impact. Most academic disciplines regard trust as a form of reliance that others will meet their commitments (Hawley 2012). In this case the commitment implied by community-led action planning is that local people will have ‘a high degree of power and/or control over the aims, design, or delivery of activities’ (CRESR 2015) therefore trust is likely to be linked to the belief that local people will have a high level of control and influence over policy and decision-making through community-led action planning.

## **2. Resources**

Key resources that were identified as important for community-led action planning included: ‘research’; ‘support’; ‘specialised knowledge and expertise’; ‘time – two way’; ‘staff’ and ‘funding’.





### *Specialised knowledge and expertise*

The need for specialised knowledge, expertise, support and research on community-led action planning suggests that it is important that community engagement practitioners have access to the latest evidence on community-led approaches and have support to carry out action research for themselves. For research evidence to be useful to practitioners, support may be needed from knowledge brokers who have the expertise to translate research evidence so that it is relevant and useful in practice. The model of WWS Collaborative Action Research was described earlier in this report. The WWS Evidence to Action workstream provides access to different kinds of evidence (contact [S.Morton@ed.ac.uk](mailto:S.Morton@ed.ac.uk)). In relation to expertise in community engagement, networks such as the Citizen Participation Network (Academy of Government) and SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre) also provide a resources link research and evidence to policy and practice. See References section for further details.

### *Time*

For practitioners in West Dunbartonshire time was a scarce resource and one that was likely to become scarcer with the restructuring of services to cope with cuts to public sector funding. Finding the time to invest in community-led action planning process can be a challenge that is often overlooked. All the action research interviews demonstrated that community-led approaches can take years rather than months to develop

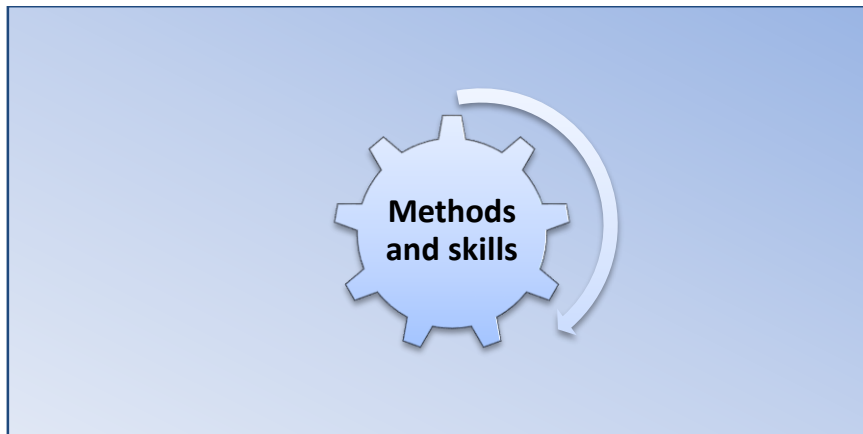
It is important that the time invested by local people in an action planning process is recognised and valued. The example from East Lothian showed that by devolving resources and actual decision-making responsibilities to groups, the CPP gave participants the confidence that their time and input was valued and taken seriously.

### *Staff and funding*

Participants described the need for 'staff and funds to support development of effective community-led groups'. People are needed with the appropriate skills, preferably a 'key worker with a relationship to the community' and staff 'working as part of a team'. In East Ayrshire consultants were contracted for the first year of developing community-led action planning.

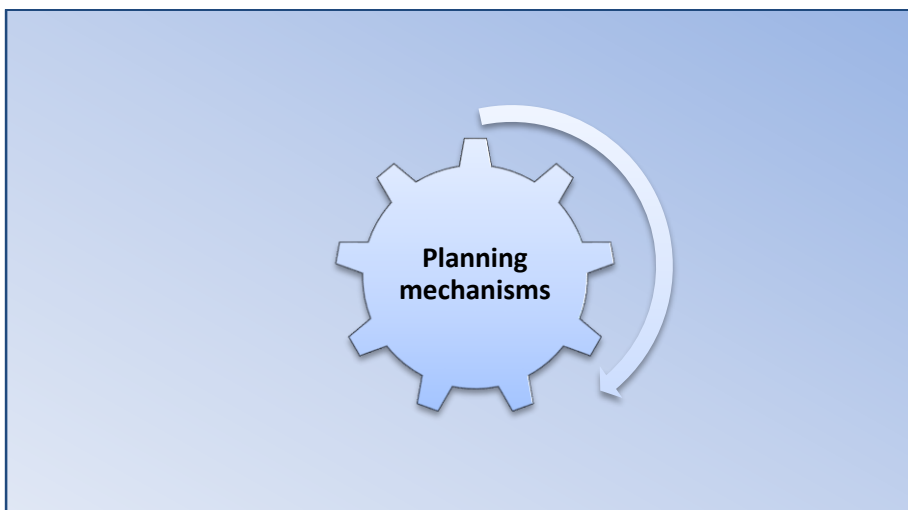
There appeared to be some dubiety over the issue of the amount of resources needed for community-led action planning. Some participants suggested a need for 'greater resources' and approaches that were 'well resourced' others had lower expectations and sought resources that were 'sufficient' 'adequate' and/or 'appropriate'. The financial restraints on public and voluntary sectors have increased the need for innovative ideas on how to plan, facilitate and support C-AP processes at low cost. One option is to reduce the number of local consultations and run fewer processes of higher quality and impact. C-AP could help to consolidate various participatory processes, bringing them under one roof.

### 3. Methods and Skills



This theme refers to the skills and confidence required by staff in order to facilitate service design, delivery and evaluation processes. Staff may benefit from 'up-skilling' in deliberative practices, in particular how to guide local people through a process of identifying and prioritising needs. Participants emphasised the need for flexible and responsive methods of community engagement to support participation such as the provision of 'informal' methods for those who are unwilling or unable to attend meetings. This included provision and support for individuals to engage in decision-making process (reducing reliance on groups and community representatives). Alongside traditional methods of engagement, participants called for greater use of 'new' methods such as dialogue approaches, social media and blogging. The methods and techniques that could be used to support community-led action planning are examined in greater depth in the next section.

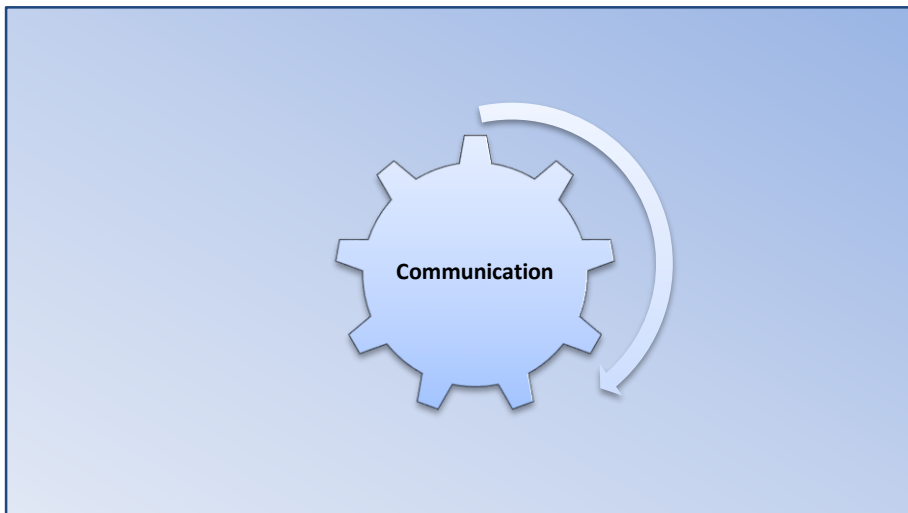
### 4. Planning Mechanisms



Participants described clear processes and structures as important conditions for community-led action planning. Three features of effective planning processes were consistently identified: first, 'clear objectives'; second, 'achievable outcomes'; and third, 'a needs-led approach'. Interestingly, there was no mention of an 'assets-based approach' as

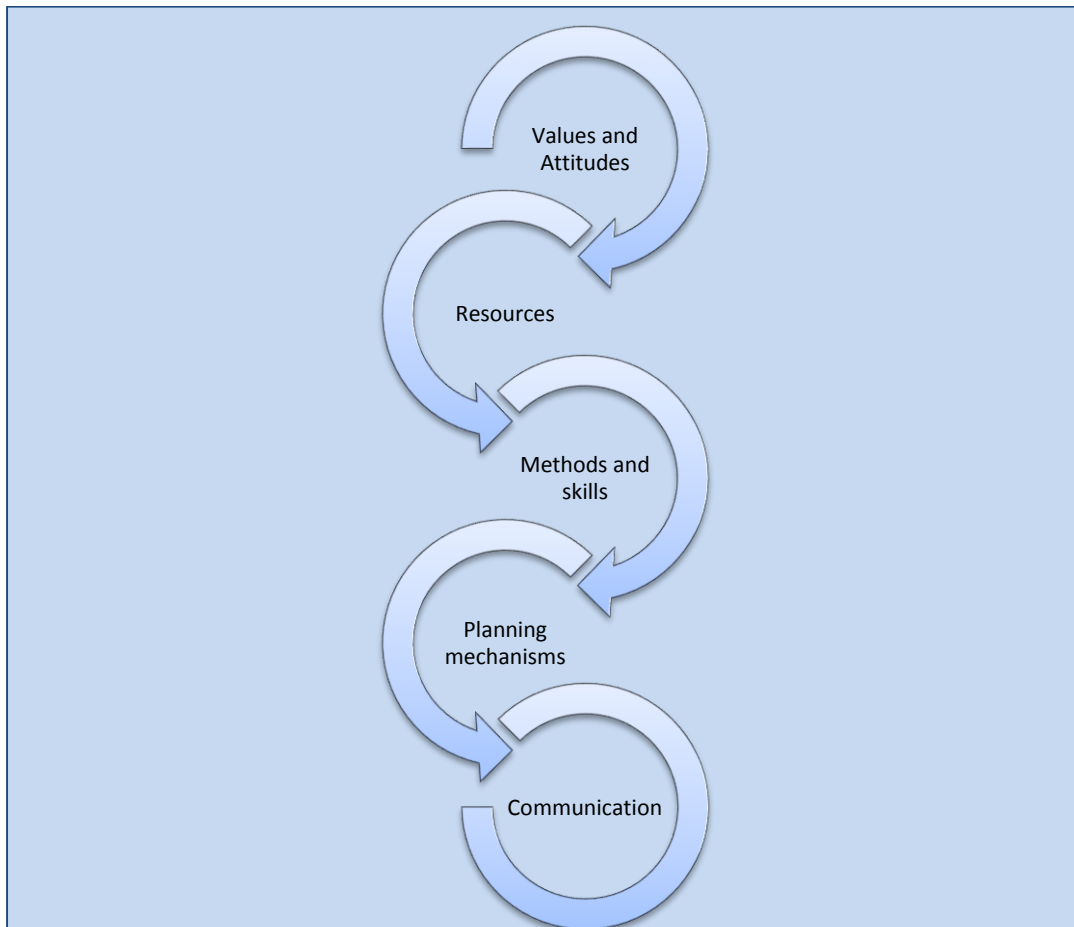
alternative to the 'needs-led' (deficit) approach. One comment suggested that community-led action planning should be 'outcomes focused' and 'evidence based'. A summary card from one table proposed that community-led action planning should start with a 'blank page'. This suggests that local people should be involved in the action planning process as early as possible and ideally before local needs and priorities have been identified. In East Ayrshire, for example, local community groups and individual volunteers are involved in the community-led action planning process from the outset and take a lead on conducting and gathering the evidence for the community survey. The examples of planning mechanisms given by participants suggest that there is a strong link between planning mechanisms and the potential for community-led action planning to have an impact on policy and decision-making.

## 5. Communication



Participants emphasised the importance of communication with the public in relation to 'awareness raising, marketing, promotion, social media etc.' ensuring that the 'public are kept fully aware of what is going on'. A strong emphasis was given to the provision of 'information' and making sure participants in community engagement processes are 'informed'. This was regarded as especially important in relation to 'evidencing outcomes – communicating what gets done' and 'feedback'. Another suggestion was the need for 'awareness of a power-shift' implying that it is not enough simply to change the way in which decisions are taken, the public need to be aware of this devolution of power and the opportunity for greater influence. Providing feedback and evidence of impact is also likely to be relevant to building trust and is one of the key components of the refreshed National Standards for Community Engagement. Forms of publicity and awareness raising that do not involve face to face dialogue may encourage inclusion and diversity and support links between community-led action plans and other processes of policy and decision making.

The diagram below shows five key conditions that might support community-led action planning in West Dunbartonshire:



## Co-Design Workshop - Community-led Action Planning in Practice

In this session participants were asked to design a process of community-led action planning for a neighbourhood in West Dunbartonshire. A real example of a neighbourhood was given and participants were provided with a brief including the background to the neighbourhood, its population and socio-economic profile. The brief also included a summary of results from a recent community survey that identified a range of priorities for community-led action planning in Alexandria. Working in pairs participants were asked to choose a local priority to work on and to consider the following questions, recording their answers on the worksheet:

- Who are the key decision-makers on this issue?
- Who has an interest/ a stake in this issue?
- What methods might you use to engage local people in agreeing actions?

See separate WWS document ***Community-Led Action Planning Interim Report – Workbook Data*** for the full workshop brief and matrix.

For some participants, this exercise presented a difficulty in trying to identify and separate decision-makers from stakeholders. Some equated ‘decision-makers’ with ‘funders’ and ‘budget holders’ whereas others made little distinction between decision makers and wider stakeholders. This might be interpreted as a positive, showing that communities already have influence and consider themselves ‘decision-makers’. On the other hand this finding may indicate a lack of clarity over who has the power to take decisions in relation to local issues and where the responsibility for action lies. Local people might lead on developing priorities and actions for a local action plan yet in practice it is unlikely that citizens and communities will have the power and resources to address all the actions identified themselves. This issue is considered further in the conclusion section.

Following the paired work on the example from Alexandria, participants took part in facilitated group discussions to explore the **methods and techniques, information and processes** that would be needed to produce a community-led action plan. Ideas were recorded on flipcharts and described in the three sections below.

### **Methods and Techniques**

Participants emphasised the importance of **using a variety of methods and techniques** to support community-led action planning including: action research interviews, focus groups, social media (survey monkey, Twitter, Facebook, voting online), world / conversation cafes; intergenerational events; participatory budgeting; engaging with community activists; presentations to groups; taster sessions; visual representation of ideas using artists; mascot competitions; surveys; walkabouts; and an elected member feedback and listening process. Some of the methods listed here are research methods, others are participatory methods and some a mix of both. Although all these methods generate data potentially it is important not to confuse participation in research with democratic participation, for example local people taking part in a community survey.

Some participants promoted the use of well-established methods such as public meetings and gala days while others argued for more innovative methods that could reduce the risk of giving a platform to 'old antagonisms' and could strengthen the potential for constructive dialogue. An example of an innovative method from the field of alcohol and drug recovery was the 'recovery café' (see UK Network for Recovery Community Development and Recovery Cafes, 2011)

Overall, the workshop responses indicated an impressive array of participation methods and understanding of the potential for involvement from individuals, groups and organisations. This suggests that there is a high level of local knowledge and expertise in the field of community engagement in West Dunbartonshire. The types of methods suggested by practitioners also demonstrate an appetite for expanding the use of creative and innovative dialogue approaches. See separate WWS document ***Community-Led Action Planning Interim Report – Workbook Data*** for a summary of workshop responses.

### **Information needed**

The table discussions identified the following **information** that may be needed to develop a community-led action plan:

- **Detailed information on the priorities and needs** of neighbourhoods derived from existing community surveys. It may be necessary to set a target response rate for local surveys and to invest time in researching the priorities identified in more depth
- **Community assets** – key contacts for community activity, people who want to get involved and premises that can be used by local groups
- **Community engagement** – knowledge of past, current and planned community engagement, successes and failures
- **Potential opportunities to engage new people** who may not have engaged in community engagement processes in the past. For example planned improvements to housing may provide an opportunity to engage tenants
- **Neighbourhood profile** – demography and socio-economic data
- **Action research** to learn how other neighbourhoods/ localities have developed successful community-led action plans

### **Processes needed**

The characteristics of processes for community-led action planning identified by participants are listed below

Processes that support community-led action planning are:

1. **Inclusive** - they involve as many people as possible including more marginalised groups and breakdown false divisions between communities and services
2. **Promote culture change** – by providing opportunities to listen and respond to local people

3. **Link to existing community groups and develop new partnerships**
4. **Promote communication** within and between local government departments and between public, voluntary and community sector partners
5. **Provide clear evidence and objectives** for action planning

Across the table groups there was a range of views on what a community-led action planning process would look like in practice. One group emphasised engaging communities and widening participation, another focused on communication between different community planning structures, another group described processes that would engage partners from both the public and voluntary sectors, and the other table emphasised an evidence-based approach.

## Learning from Evaluations

Analysis of evaluation forms completed at the end of the event, provides a useful picture of the Development Day experience and the contribution of the day towards developing a model of community-led action planning in West Dunbartonshire. 22 evaluation forms were completed and returned from a total of 30 participants (73% return rate).

The table below summarises returns from the evaluation forms:

	Good or Very Good or Excellent
Improving understanding the 'Your Community' approach to planning services at a neighbourhood level.	68%
Improve your knowledge of the Community Empowerment Act and its implications in relation to current and new practice.	68%
Share and generate innovative ideas on planning, facilitating and supporting Community-led Action Planning.	82%
Build on existing connections and discover opportunities for collaboration with other practitioners.	82%
Overall design of the event	90%

The C-AP Development Day was designed to facilitate collaborative learning in relation to community engagement and neighbourhood approaches to community planning in WD. The day provided an opportunity to build a shared understanding of Community-led Action Planning and an opportunity to contribute to the design of processes tailored for West Dunbartonshire.





methods, information and processes that will be needed to support community-led action planning in West Dunbartonshire. An important lesson for CAR research is the need for flexibility and models of collaborative research that can be easily adapted to the local context. WWS and the WD Communities Team co-produced the planning and design of the Development Day, however, the facilitation of the event was led by WWS to reduce time pressure on local staff and allow the Communities Team to participate. The interim findings and data presented in this report were collated and written by the WWS Research Associate with support from the Communities Team (with fact-checking the details of the action-research interviews).

The reason that WWS took a lead role in writing this interim report rather than a co-authored report, was partly in response to the tight timescales and pressures to develop community-led action plans at a local level; partly caused by the limited time and capacity of staff who were re-deployed at short notice to work on the settlement and integration of Refugees; and also a response to the difficulties surrounding staff roles and workloads as the Council and CPP undergoes another round of service re-structuring. Issues of staff capacity and the instability caused by cuts to public budgets are significant challenges for the practice of CAR and meant that it was necessary for WWS to adapt the CAR model to give greater priority to responding to the immediate operational needs of the local area. The work of WWS in West Dunbartonshire has followed a Collaborative Action Research cycle (see Figure 1), although this approach to our work has been implicit rather than an explicit area of attention or discussion. In the next phase of work the aspiration is to discuss the research process and our roles within it more explicitly and to negotiate the space for staff to participate.

### **Community Empowerment and the Changing Policy Landscape**

The C-AP Development Day was successful in its aim of increasing knowledge amongst community engagement practitioners of the 'Your Community', neighbourhood approach to community planning in West Dunbartonshire. This was also an opportunity for some participants to refresh their knowledge of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015) and for others to learn about the Act for the first time. Participants were introduced to examples of good practice in community-led action planning from other local authority areas and were able to contribute their local knowledge and professional expertise. The evaluations show that most participants valued the opportunity to discuss and share their ideas on community-led approaches. The opportunity to network and collaborate with other community engagement practitioners across council departments, public and voluntary sector services was also well received.

In the field of community engagement and empowerment, the Scottish policy landscape is transforming quickly. The year ahead is likely to be pivotal for community empowerment as new legislative powers become a reality. There are, however, a few hurdles that remain. Secondary legislation (orders and regulations) and guidance need to be developed before the Community Empowerment Act can come into effect. This work is currently underway through a number of working and advisory groups. For example the Advisory Group on Participation is working on the guidance for 'participation and public decision making', Part 10 of the Act that refers to the powers that ministers will have to require any public

authority to involve people in decisions making- including financial decisions. This part of the Act is likely to come into force in summer 2016.

Running in tandem to the work on the Community Empowerment Act is a process lead by SCDC to update the National Standards for Community Engagement. The new draft standards place greater emphasis on Equalities and on Impact. In relation to Impact the focus is on closing the feedback and reporting loop, requiring a clear response from the public authority on the impact of the participation. The need for improved performance in relation to **Inclusion, Impact** and **Feedback** (communication) was strongly echoed in the points raised by participants at the West Dunbartonshire C-AP Development Day.

Given this rapidly evolving policy landscape, on-going work will be required to continue to raise awareness and develop a shared language and understanding of these policies and their implications in West Dunbartonshire. This is needed at all levels including elected members, senior managers and front line staff. The C-AP Development Day was the beginning of a conversation with community engagement practitioners on the Community Empowerment Act and its implications. This event could be regarded as the start of an ongoing process of learning, capacity building and collaboration across services, departments, organisations and groups on the new agenda of community empowerment.

### **From Community Engagement to ‘Community-led’**

The term ‘community led’ implies moving beyond community engagement which is ‘a working relationship between public bodies and community groups’ (NSCE 2011), to a position where community groups and citizens are able to exert:

*a high degree of power and/or control over the aims, design, or delivery of activities’ in defined geographical neighbourhoods. (CRESR 2015)*

The evaluations from the day show that the event was successful in generating innovative and exciting ideas for Community-led Action Planning in West Dunbartonshire. There was a strong emphasis on the using a range of community engagement methods rather than one standard approach, findings ways of including a wide diversity of views and focusing on methods that are welcoming and enjoyable which will provide the opportunity for constructive dialogue and deliberation.

A meaningful and effective approach to community-led action planning in West Dunbartonshire will be supported by the following conditions:

1. Values and Attitudes
2. Resources
3. Methods and skills
4. Planning mechanisms
5. Communication.

These five conditions are not particularly surprising. Most CPPs in Scotland might be expected to list the same set of issues and indeed many of these points echo the findings from research carried out on the challenges in organising community engagement (see Escobar 2014c). The most interesting and notable finding from this exercise was the extent to which participants emphasised the need for greater attention to the values and attitudes necessary to underpin community-led approaches. More than one third of the cards recorded in the meta-planning exercise referred in particular to the need for a greater openness to change; inclusion and diversity; and trust and commitment. While resources, methods, planning mechanisms and communications may be important, values and attitudes were regarded as by far the most significant driver or barrier to change in West Dunbartonshire.

This interim finding suggests that successful community-led action planning needs to be linked to wider transformations in working practices and cultures. In practice this means increasing the decision-making autonomy and capacity of staff to listen to a diversity of views, to learn from local people, to compromise and respond positively to change. In planning this event the Communities team recognised that an immediate challenge in developing this approach was likely to be identifying staff who are motivated and have the delegated authority from their organisation to work with local people and partners on community led approaches to service improvement at a neighbourhood level. It was also recognised from the outset that commitment and buy-in is required at a strategic/political and senior management level within departments of the Council and across public and voluntary sector organisations. The importance of engaging local Councillors as leaders in this process was highlighted as a key area for future action.

WWS in partnership with Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) and the Information Services Division (ISD) are supporting another collaborative action research project in West Dunbartonshire. The outcome of this project will be the publication of neighbourhood profiles which will provide statistical data and indicators across a range of dimensions. This data will provide a useful source of information on the characteristics of local populations that could be used to plan more inclusive engagement processes at a local level<sup>3</sup>.

Arguably one of most challenging issues raised by practitioners at the Development Day was how to build trust and commitment to community-led action planning processes. There may be something of the chicken and the egg here since, it is difficult for staff and local communities to commit to a model and process that has not been fully designed and articulated yet. Some areas in West Dunbartonshire have witnessed a series of area-based initiatives over more than forty years. Often these have failed to live up to expectations and have not achieved the long-term and transformative change anticipated. The reasons for this failure are well documented in academic research yet this history is likely to make the task of building trust and commitment to community-led action planning in some neighbourhoods more challenging. The legacy of area-based initiatives and the need to build trust at a local level is shared by CPPs across Scotland and is an important area for collaborative learning at a national level.

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<sup>3</sup> For more information contact [claire.bynner@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:claire.bynner@glasgow.ac.uk)

Trust relies on the expectation of a certain outcome. It follows that if community-led action planning creates the expectation that communities and citizens will have ‘ a high degree of power and/or control’ then levels of trust and commitment to the process will be influenced by the extent to which communities can be confident that the CPP will meet that commitment. If the process does not result in a high level of power and control in practice then the language of ‘community-led action planning’ may be regarded as ‘empty rhetoric’ and local people will be less likely to invest time in a similar process in the future. The extent to which local people will trust and commit to the process over the longer-term is linked to whether community-led action planning can live up to its expectations.

Early findings from the pilot neighbourhood show that it may be helpful to separate different types of community-empowerment that require different approaches and responses from services:

- **Community-led** - where there is scope for self-organising or direct influence of issues of policy or financial resources/ funding
- **Community-initiated** - actions that have arisen from the views of local people and which initiated a process of dialogue, deliberation and negotiation with service providers to examine options and seek solutions
- **Customer service and complaints** - actions that require provision of information or immediate service response (mostly) to individuals. This form of communication (or lack of communication) if it is not dealt with quickly and efficiently can create a barrier to collective action.

The action research interviews discussed in this report demonstrate that community groups and individuals can be motivated to engage in new ‘community led’ action planning processes initiated by the CPP if they are offered an attractive proposition in terms of decision-making and/ or control over funding, if they are engaged as early as possible in the process and if they are confident that the CPP will meet its commitments.

## **Developing the Your Community Neighbourhood Approach in West Dunbartonshire**

There is empirical evidence that clear goal setting leads to improved performance. This led to a question regarding the clarity of the goal and the vision of change in West Dunbartonshire in relation to the Your Community policy.

Key questions for further reflection:

- To what extent is this a technical, practical or emancipatory project?
- Is the purpose to improve performance in what the CPP already does? If it is then who will gain from this improvement and how would we know it was better?
- To what extent is the new approach about challenging current ways of working and the power relationships the CCP is embedded in? Whose meanings and notions of effectiveness and performance will dominate?
- In the trade off between local priorities and outcomes and those set at wider spatial scales, which will take precedence? How much decision-making autonomy will be devolved to the neighbourhood level?

The example of community-led action planning in East Lothian described a process that involved aligning local priorities to East Lothian's Single Outcome Agreement. It is not yet clear whether the requirement in the Community Empowerment Act for CPPs to develop local outcome improvement plans (LOIPs) will entail a similar process of alignment, or whether in practice this new approach will reduce the emphasis on aligning local priorities to broader outcomes and will give localities greater flexibility to develop independent priorities and actions. This is an area that will require further consideration in the roll out of Your Community when the guidance on the Community Empowerment Act is available.

### **Next steps**

The interim findings from the WWS Collaborative Action research in WD demonstrate that like community engagement, community-led action planning presents a range of challenges for practitioners. Where community engagement promotes good working relationships between local people and local services, community-led approaches appear to require a more substantial shift in values and attitudes. Community-led action planning demands that public services demonstrate greater openness to dialogue, compromise and service redesign; enhanced efforts to promote inclusion and diversity; and the ability to build relations of trust.

It is important to highlight that the analyses and discussion in this report are preliminary. They serve as a springboard for the future work of the WWS team and the case study partners. Between now and December 2016, the WWS team will continue to work with the WD CPP to take forward local projects and to capture and share this learning. This work will include further Collaborative Retreats and local events as required. The following are the proposed next steps for the WWS collaborative action research project on C-AP:

1. Evaluate the 'Your Community' pilot neighbourhood and phase one areas. This opportunity for real time learning and practical application will provide important insights into the barriers and facilitators to a community-led process in practice to inform future design and delivery.
2. Review academic evidence from research on community-led programmes of public service reform. This data could provide further information on the drivers of systemic change
3. Agree a framework for analysis and a process for conducting the analysis in collaboration
4. Co-write and co-produce a final report on Community-led Action Planning in West Dunbartonshire

## References for Further Information

### Further information on approaches to Community-led Action Planning from Action Research:

- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Community-led Plan
- East Lothian
- East Ayrshire Vibrant Communities

### Examples of networks and organisations in the field of community engagement and public participation:

- Citizen Participation Network (Academy of Government)
- SCDC (Scottish Community Development Centre)
- SCN (Scottish Co-production Network)
- CDAS (Community Development Alliance Scotland)
- Scottish Health Council
- PAS (Planning Aid Scotland)
- IAP2 (International Association for Public Participation)
- Involve
- Democratic Society

### Examples of useful resources:

- <http://www.voicescotland.org.uk>
- <http://www.communityscot.org.uk>
- <http://participedia.net>
- <http://participationcompass.org>
- [www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)
- <http://pbscotland.scot>
- <http://www.pas.org.uk>
- <http://www.iap2.org>

### Other references:

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## Appendix 1 - Programme



### Community-led Action Planning Day

Thursday, 29 October 2015 from 9.30 am – 2.00pm

Clydebank Town Hall

#### PROGRAMME

9.30 - 10.00	Registration and beverages
10.00 - 10.20	Purpose of session/ Overview of Your Community Amanda Coulthard (Community Planning West Dunbartonshire)
10.20 - 10.35	The Scottish Policy Context and the Community Empowerment Act, Oliver Escobar (What Works Scotland)
10:35 - 10:55	Table introductions and questions for speakers chaired by Claire Bynner (What Works Scotland)
10.55 - 11.25	Examples of Community-led Action Planning in Scotland – Key Findings from Action Research, Sonya Peddie and Anne Clegg (Community Planning West Dunbartonshire)
11:25 - 11:40	<b>BREAK</b>
11.40 - 12.20	Table Discussions – What Works in Community-led Action planning?
12.20 - 13.00	Design Workshop: Co-designing a community-led action planning process for a neighbourhood in West Dunbartonshire
13:0 - 13:05	What happens next? Taking this approach forward and Evaluation, Amanda Coultard (Community Planning West Dunbartonshire)
13.05 - 14.00	<b>LUNCH</b> – Stay for lunch and make some connections!