

Democracy
Matters

Democracy Matters

The title 'Democracy Matters' is rendered in a large, sans-serif font. 'Democracy' is in green and 'Matters' is in blue. The letters are filled with icons representing various groups of people: an elderly person with a cane, a person in a wheelchair, a person pushing a stroller, and a person standing on a brick wall. Speech bubbles are placed above the 'o' in 'Democracy' and the 't' in 'Matters'.

Your Community. Your Ideas. Your Future.



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Democracy

[dih-mok-ruh-see]

government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system.

Matters

[mat-ers]

a situation, state, affair, or business something of consequence.

Somebody somewhere is making decisions on your behalf. They could be an MP, MSP, local councillor or public service worker. This involves public sector organisations like the NHS, police, councils, the Scottish Government, and a whole range of public bodies responsible for services like local enterprise, housing and transport. This is important work that affects our lives in all sorts of ways, such as helping us to stay safe and healthy, and access fair work and social care.

In recent years, something has begun to change. There is a growing recognition that it is often better for decisions about the issues that affect different communities in Scotland to be taken with more active involvement of those communities. Whether that is communities in different places organising at a very local level, or communities with a shared interest organising at a more regional level. This enables public services to work in ways which meet local circumstances and reflect the priorities of different communities.

Citizens are also getting involved in many different ways to decide what will most help their community, neighbourhood, or town to thrive. For example, Scotland has a vibrant Community Development Trust movement,

community based Housing Associations deliver much more than affordable housing, and early interest in Participatory Budgeting shows people want a direct say over how public money is used in their area. All of this is a matter of democracy, and democracy matters. But for many people, decision-making can feel like something that happens far away. And for some groups, like disabled people, ethnic minorities or those living with poverty, there are barriers to getting equally involved.

In modern Scotland power must work in a way that involves and benefits everyone. To get this right, we will review how responsibilities and resources can be shared across national and local government in a way that delivers the greatest benefit to Scotland's different places. However, the starting point must be with our citizens and the power and potential within our communities themselves.

We want to hear your voice and the voices of your friends and neighbours in a discussion about local communities deciding their own future.

We think communities being more in control will create exciting opportunities. If you agree, does this mean communities having a stronger voice when decisions about them are taken? Is it about having the powers and resources to use as they think best?

How could any of this be made to work in your local area or community? And how can we ensure that any changes promote equality and reflect Scotland's rich diversity?

The questions below are designed to help begin a conversation in communities about the kind of changes they want to see happen. We want to hear as many voices as possible, and in particular those who are all too often under represented. Visit our webpage to find information about how decisions about Scotland's public services are currently taken, and the different ways you can join the conversation:

www.gov.scot/democracymatters
or email us at: democracymatters@gov.scot

As the conversation builds, we'll share all that we hear so you can see for yourself the kind of changes people most want. As we understand how all of this could be made to work we will share different ideas at a series of events later in 2018. All who have contributed to the discussion will be invited to attend, and to tell us what makes most sense for their community.

We'll also be working with councils and a wide range of public services to understand what would make a positive difference to how they work locally. A public consultation on any new laws that are required will follow – probably next year. Please do get involved: you will be helping to strengthen democracy and make Scotland a better place for all.

Join the conversation:

www.gov.scot/democracymatters
democracymatters@gov.scot

Section 1: Communities more in control – a good idea to begin with?

Many people will have experienced decision-making processes that affect their lives and the public services they rely upon - whether at a national or local level. How easy is it to get involved and have your say? Some people may feel excluded from these decision-making processes. It is crucial we understand the barriers experienced.

Q1. Tell us about your experiences of getting involved in decision-making processes that affect your local community or community of interest.

Democracy in Scotland works in different ways. People have the opportunity to go to the ballot box at various elections to elect their representatives who are democratically accountable for making decisions in their name. People are also increasingly playing a more active role in ensuring that their voice is heard when decisions are made about the issues they care about most in local communities, and by taking decisions for themselves. This conversation is about identifying new approaches that will ensure these different ways of taking decisions complement each other to best effect.

Q2. Would you like your local community or community of interest to have more control over some decisions? If yes, what sorts of issues would those decisions cover?



Section 2: Communities more in control – how could it work in practice?

If more decisions are to be taken by communities, we would have to decide on the scale at which this would work: this could be at a very local level but would depend on the decision being made, the skills and expertise required, and the potential impact on different people. It's unlikely that the answer will be the same for every place or community. Through this conversation we want to understand what types and sizes of community make most sense to people, and why. It's a complicated issue, and we want to hear what you think would work.

We want to explore how all public services, councils and the Scottish Government can make this work. Existing groups that take action and are part of decision-making in communities include council area committees, area partnerships, community councils, development trusts, community based housing associations and community led groups and organisations. Other forms of decision-making, like Participatory Budgeting and community action planning are also being developed, although not all public services currently work this way. Perhaps all of these different structures and processes could be built on, or developed, to support greater levels of community decision-making across public services and to strengthen local democracy. That might include sharing powers or resources differently between the Scottish Government, councils and communities, a second, more local, layer of local government, or other potential

Q3. When thinking about decision-making, 'local' could mean a large town, a village, or a neighbourhood. What does 'local' mean to you and your community?

ideas. Regardless of the structures or processes people like best, this review is also a key opportunity to ensure diverse community voices are heard in decision-making processes. Get this right and it will help make a real difference to local priorities, and progress equalities and human rights across Scotland, including on issues such as housing, health and the enjoyment of a decent standard of living.

Q4. Are there existing forms of local level decision-making which could play a part in exercising new local powers? Are there new forms of local decision-making that could work well? What kinds of changes might be needed for this to work in practice?



Section 3: Communities more in control – what is most important to know before we go any further?

This is a big topic and the questions we've asked you to consider here won't have covered everything that will need to be explored. This will happen as people come forward with their ideas and the conversation builds. We'd like to take this opportunity to ask you to make any final points you feel are important, and invite you to ask any questions that will help you to remain part of the conversation.

Q5. Do you have any other comments, ideas or questions? Is there more you want to know?





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