

Local People Leading

A Vision for a Stronger Community Sector



Scottish Community Alliance

March 2016

This report has been produced with contributions from the following networks:

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND

Community
Energy
Scotland

cta
uk
Community
Transport
Association

Scottish Communities
Climate Action Network

plunkett
scotland
Incorporating Community
Retailing Network

Social
Firms
Scotland

Voluntary Arts Scotland
Ealain Saor-thoileach an Alba

SC
HW
community-hub

evh
supporting
social
employers

Federation of
City Farms
& Community
Gardens

NOURISH
SCOTLAND

Scottish League
Of Credit Unions

Scottish Allotments
and Gardens Society

SEN SCOT

Community
Woodlands
Association

GWSF
Glasgow and West of Scotland
Forum of Housing Associations

CRNS
Reuse Repair Recycle
Community Resources Network Scotland

DEVELOPMENT
TRUSTS ASSOCIATION
SCOTLAND
the community-led regeneration network

These networks come together as the Scottish Community Alliance.

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Overview

Scotland's community-based networks have collaborated over a six-month period to produce this joint vision of how Scotland's community sector can **grow** and **develop**. These national intermediaries represent a wide variety of community interests, with a collective membership spanning the length and breadth of Scotland. Together these networks form the **Scottish Community Alliance**.

This report has been written at a time when the spotlight of public policy is focused as never before on the role that Scotland's communities can play in helping to meet the many challenges facing the country. It offers a brief analysis of the key factors that determine these social, economic and environmental challenges and a realistic appraisal of how communities contribute to the solutions.

The report aims to distinguish the community sector from other parts of the broader third sector, as being the wide range of self-organised activity that is led by, and accountable to, the people who live and work in geographically defined areas. Often this activity takes place under the radar of public awareness and as such, its contribution to both the social and the real economy is often underestimated.

The report sets out our shared vision for communities to become more empowered and for the community sector as a whole, to become stronger.

Collectively we seek to create the conditions for genuine and widespread community empowerment. This will only occur when local people have the confidence and the means to drive forward programmes of change within their communities. This invariably means having real influence over local decision-making as well as control over resources.

We have set out four core principles that underpin our vision. These principles are:

1. Subsidiarity
2. Self-Determination
3. Local by Default
4. Equality and Fairness

We recognise that achieving our vision requires fundamental and systemic change. The report therefore describes the changes that are needed across three interdependent spheres of activity:

- **Local Democracy**, including measures to reinvigorate representative and participatory democracy, and put communities at the heart of Scotland's planning system.
- **Public services**, where there needs to be a major shift towards commissioning services more locally, more support for sustainable service delivery through community and co-operative enterprises, and a comprehensive programme of support to facilitate the effective transfer of public assets.

- **The Community Sector**, where we call for sustained investment in community anchor organisations, a national community leadership initiative, support for self-organising, mutually supportive community networks, and the rebuilding of a national community development infrastructure.

To make the type of step-change required, we call on government, both national and local, to collaborate on a long-term plan to support the growth and future development of Scotland's community sector.

"The classic kind of empowered community is one that is confident, resilient, energetic and independent. It is well networked. It has a high degree of social capital. It is confident enough to imagine a better future for itself, and is in a position to take control of that future. It has the breadth of vision to be able to enlist others and other agencies in helping it to deliver its ambitions. By contrast, a disempowered community is one which is dependent on people external to itself to address its needs and whose future is directed by others."

Alison Elliot, from a paper written for The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Community Empowerment and Capacity Building (Aug 2014)

Context

This document has been developed during a time of significant change and uncertainty in Scotland – a time when communities will have to rely increasingly on their **shared resources** to meet **everyday challenges**.

A time of uncertainty

This is the most significant period of change in Scotland for generations.

We see a unique combination of circumstances impacting on communities, not least:

- The drawing back of public services in the face of austerity cuts, amid mounting demand on and rising expectations of our public services.
- An unstable economic system, giving rise to great uncertainty in markets and a growing recognition of the limits of private enterprise.
- The implications of climate change and its long-term impact on places, people and livelihoods in Scotland.
- Political change, with renewed levels of civic engagement in the debate around Scotland's constitutional future, both within the UK and as part of the European Union.

The above factors have heightened mistrust in large-scale and centralised solutions – irrespective of whether these are delivered by the public or private sectors – and a growing interest in the potential of communities to take local action and deliver solutions that focus on local need.

Growing challenges

It is clear that some communities are not as well placed as others to cope with this period of economic, environmental and political uncertainty. They rely more on external agencies to meet their everyday needs and to determine their future.

We see many villages, towns and neighbourhoods across Scotland that are fragile and under stress. In these areas trust has often broken down, aspirations are lower, with a perceived lack of opportunity due to a range of social and economic pressures. These communities are often characterised as being disempowered and stereotyped as being dependent on others (on food banks, welfare payments and so on).

But just as elsewhere, most people from these 'disadvantaged communities' are equally able to recognise the challenges that they wish to overcome and can identify the opportunities for improvement. We believe that remarkable strengths lie within each and every community, but that all too often, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities, attention has only focused on the problems and challenges. We believe that this 'deficit' perspective prevails across much of the public sector and that this must become one of the key areas of change in the future.

The prospect of civic renewal

At times of uncertainty, people often look to their collective, shared resources for the answers.

People instinctively seek more influence over the things that affect their everyday lives; from global issues such as climate change to more local challenges such as access to high quality public services. If the Independence Referendum taught us anything, it is that people are far from being apathetic about their circumstances when given the chance to actively consider their options.

Allied to this, and particularly over the past 10-15 years, there has been growing evidence of increased levels of collective action on social and environmental issues. New campaigns and movements, new activity by self-organising groups and networks, the formation of new community self-help groups and enterprises, and an increase in the scale of community ownership of local land, buildings and other resources. And most significantly, there is **ample evidence of an appetite for more**.

This highlights the great potential that exists for communities to renew themselves, to become more resilient, and for better outcomes to occur.

Supportive policy

Against this backdrop, the idea of 'community empowerment' has never had a higher profile across the policy landscape – no surprise perhaps, given the current constraints facing the public sector.

A raft of independent proposals have called for such empowerment: from the Christie Commission to the Land Reform Review Group, the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy, and elsewhere. We have also welcomed enabling legislation brought forward in the form of the Community Empowerment Act and Land Reform Bill.

While this is very positive, it represents only a starting point. As the policy commitments work through to implementation, we must be equally cautious of the rhetoric and be realistic in our expectations. The further empowerment of communities is essential but this is only part of the change we want to see in Scotland. It is equally important to recognise there is a real limit to what communities can be expected to take on and deliver without substantive change occurring in parallel, but associated, spheres of activity.



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Scotland's Community Sector

Hundreds of thousands of people across Scotland are already working towards making their communities **better places** to live. This citizen-driven community sector already makes a **unique** and **vital** contribution, but with appropriate **encouragement** and **support** it can do much more.

Distinctive...

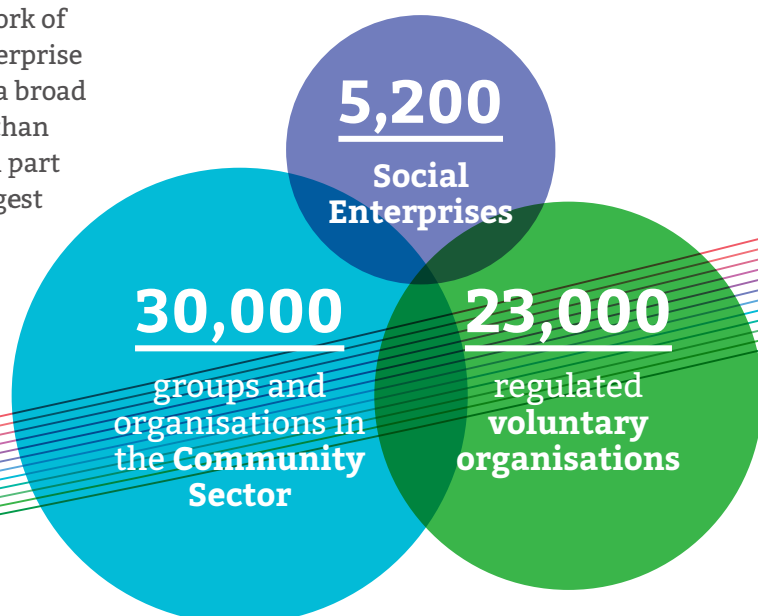
Scotland's **community sector** takes the form of thousands of self-organising groups, organisations, networks and activities.

What makes our community sector distinct is that all activity occurs within geographically defined areas (villages, towns and neighbourhoods), and is led by and accountable to the people who live and work there.



SCOTLAND'S THIRD SECTOR

Our community sector sits alongside the work of the voluntary/charity sector and social enterprise movement as an equally important part of a broad third sector. There are believed to be more than **30,000** groups and organisations that form part of our community sector, making it the largest part of Scotland's third sector.



Diverse...

A wide assortment of groups and organisations make up the community sector.

Some groups are informal, with activities run solely by volunteers and based on common interests and mutual support (e.g. sports clubs, faith-based groups, arts groups).

Others have become more formally organised, holding modest grants, sometimes employing staff, owning assets and delivering a limited range of local services. These are often regulated as charities but retain their local focus.

Others still, have become large and professional organisations, such as community controlled housing associations, with turnovers that can run into several million pounds and a large professional workforce.

All, however, remain firmly rooted in and accountable to their community.

Essential...

This grassroots community sector is central to everyday life in Scotland. The contribution of the community sector is evident in everything from the homes that we live in, to the sports we enjoy, to the way that our children are cared for. However, for too long its scale, diversity and contribution has gone largely unnoticed, operating under the radar of government, and not yet fully recognised or understood.



An essential contribution

Just some of the ways that the community sector is making a difference...

TRANSPORT

Scotland's **300** community transport operators provide over **3.5 million** passenger journeys annually, primarily to older and disabled people. The sector owns or manages at least **1,327** vehicles.

SOCIAL HOUSING

More than **81** community controlled housing associations and co-operatives in Scotland provide over **85,000** homes for rent, employ some **2,200** staff, involve almost **20,000** active tenant members, and command an annual income of around **£346m**.

SPORT AND CULTURE

Scotland's **13,000** community sports clubs represent over 80 sports and include **150,000** adults in the regular coaching or organising of grassroots activity. Added to this, more than **10,000** voluntary arts groups ensure that over half the adult population take part in creative activity on a regular basis.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Scotland's **104** credit unions are providing flexible savings, loans and other financial services to over **324,000** adults with **£445m** in savings and **£275m** in loans. Community-run credit unions remain key to tackling poverty and financial exclusion.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Hundreds of development trusts across Scotland manage major assets, including land, buildings, vehicles and renewables installations. They act as an essential anchor for community-led regeneration.

ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS

Over **200** allotment sites in Scotland provide some **6,000** plots where local people are growing enough fruit and vegetables to feed a town of **20,000**. Added to this, well over **100** community gardens and city farms are supporting community growing more widely.

LAND

More than **200,000** hectares of land is now under community ownership. This is supporting fragile rural economies and contributing to the quality of life for some **25,000** people who live there.

ENERGY

Scotland's communities own **23 Megawatts** (MW) of installed renewables capacity, with further capacity coming online that will power **160,000** homes and bring **£15 million** annually into community funds.

WOODLANDS

Scotland's **200** community woodland groups own or manage **100,000** hectares of woodland and associated habitats, which produce thousands of tonnes of timber and receive over a million visits annually.

CHILDCARE

Scotland's **978** community sector childcare services employ **6,570** people and account for the majority of the country's after school care provision (**55%**) and play groups (**86%**).

WASTE

The community reuse and recycling sector diverts in excess of **50,000** tonnes from landfill each year, generates a turnover of more than **£60 million**, supports **1,200** jobs and provides a range of benefits at community level across Scotland.

SHOPS

There are now **32** community-owned shops in Scotland, with another **18** in the pipeline. These provide access to vital everyday goods and produce, particularly in rural areas.

HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

Community-led health improvement organisations work to improve the health and well-being of people in their surrounding area. There are currently **74** organisations operating in Scotland, they employ over **500** staff, involve **3000** active volunteers and engage over **300,000** beneficiaries each year.

... Leading to Better Outcomes

We know that successful efforts to empower communities and strengthen our community sector can lead to a number of positive outcomes.

BENEFITS FOR THE PEOPLE INVOLVED

Activity intended to empower communities gives people a sense of control over their lives. The people involved tend to develop confidence and improve skills, leading to raised aspirations for themselves and their areas. As a result they are more likely to volunteer, take more responsibility locally, and exert influence on local matters often in some form of representative role.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY GROUPS

The process of bringing people together to achieve things can lead to new or strengthened community group activity. New groups may form and the skills, capabilities and resources available to existing groups may also increase over time as groups find that they can achieve more together than apart.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Entire communities can benefit from the actions of a core of active citizens and the activities of small groups. We see that improvements to public services occur when local voices are heard in the design and delivery of those services. This process of local renewal builds social capital and generates increased levels of civic pride and satisfaction.

BETTER PUBLIC POLICY OUTCOMES

Greater influence and responsibility on the part of local people and groups helps to deliver on public policy goals. Programmes and services can become more attuned to local needs and a better system of support established. Collectively this can achieve better local outcomes and in turn aid national progress towards a smarter, healthier, wealthier, fairer, greener, safer and stronger Scotland.

The specific contribution that Scotland's community sector makes to different areas of Government policy are detailed in a series of separate policy appendices. These also identify a number of key areas where the Scottish Government can help to realise the full potential of the community sector.

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A Shared Vision : Local People Leading

We seek to create the conditions for **genuine** and widespread community **empowerment**. This will only occur when local people have the **confidence** and the means to drive forward programmes of change within their communities. This invariably means having real **influence** over local decision-making as well as control over resources.

This shared vision is underpinned by four core principles:

SUBSIDIARITY

We believe that any decision that directly impacts on a community should be taken as close to that community as possible and that nothing should be done by a larger, more complex organisation if it is feasible for a smaller and more local organisation to do it. As an organising principle, subsidiarity should underpin all aspects of public policy.

SELF-DETERMINATION

We believe that authority rests with local people and that they have the right to determine for themselves where the boundaries of their community lie, and which organisational structures are best suited to take forward their plans for local empowerment.

LOCAL BY DEFAULT

We believe that the locus of control over the commissioning and delivery of services should routinely be located at the neighbourhood level and any attempt to move beyond the neighbourhood needs to be justified in terms of being exceptional.

EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS

We believe that the emerging opportunities for local empowerment should be available to all sections of a community and to all communities regardless of their circumstances. Where barriers exist, practical measures must be put in place to overcome them.

Change is Needed...

To deliver this shared vision and to create the conditions necessary for the kind of transformation that communities **aspire** to, we believe there needs to be substantial change across three key spheres of activity – our system of **local democracy**, our **public services** and across our **community sector**. It is important to note that progress within each sphere is interdependent on sufficient progress occurring across the other two.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY

During the run up to the Independence Referendum in 2014, we saw clear evidence of the country's appetite for democracy being revitalised. Communities everywhere came alive as they debated Scotland's constitutional future. There is now a strong desire at all levels of government to capitalise on this new found civic energy so that it might catalyse a process of long-term and sustained democratic renewal across the country. Prior to the referendum, many believed that the health of local democracy in particular had been in long-term decline. Consistently low voter turnout over many years suggested that our system of local government was perceived as being remote and disconnected from the lives of voters.

We need to renew both our representative and participatory democracy simultaneously because the health of one is inextricably linked to the health of the other. Put simply, new

arrangements must be found for representing and involving communities in the decisions that affect their lives. For example, nowhere is there a greater current disconnect than in our planning system, where community aspirations, plans and opinion often take a back seat to developer interests, despite there being formal provision for community 'participation' in place.

These changes should go hand-in-hand with a more deliberative and participative approach to democracy. This is about creating more opportunities for citizens to participate in local decision-making on an ongoing basis, having more say in important decisions that affect them and directly influencing the priorities for local public services and spending.

We call for the following changes:

1A. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD BRING FORWARD MEASURES TO REINVIGORATE LOCAL DEMOCRACY

We call for a new, tiered-approach to representative democracy, organised into smaller units that better reflect the geography of villages, towns and neighbourhoods across the country.

This does **not** require wholesale local government reorganisation and could co-exist alongside the current regional level of administration exercised by local authorities, but should include **a genuine devolution of power and budgets in agreed service areas**. The review should consider how to resolve the continuing uncertainty surrounding the future role of our Community Councils. It would involve ambitious and wide-ranging measures to extend active citizen participation in local decision-making, building on existing successful models such as recent participatory budgeting approaches and tried-and-tested mechanisms (such as Citizen Assemblies) to foster rather than manage public input to decisions. We acknowledge that such profound developments in civic life will require significant shifts in culture and understanding on all sides, but feel that the work must begin now in order to create the longer term conditions for our sector to thrive.

1B. COMMUNITIES SHOULD SIT AT THE HEART OF SCOTLAND'S PLANNING SYSTEM

The current Scottish Government review of the planning system recognises the need to achieve a quicker, more accessible and efficient planning process in which both developers and communities can have confidence. However, over many years the planning system has evolved into an exercise in top-down development planning from which communities have felt increasingly excluded. The policy rhetoric suggests that the opportunities for community engagement in planning decisions exist at the start of the planning process but the lived experience of many communities has been very different. It is clear that the planning system has a long way to go in terms of closer alignment with the principles of community empowerment.

Communities must have confidence in the planning system and believe that their input to the process is as valued as that of any other stakeholder. This requires a more equitable planning process, with new procedures ensuring the needs of communities are more fairly weighed alongside other interests. Central to this should be the part played by communities in shaping the content of the local development plan. Communities and their local partners should be encouraged to draw up locally agreed Community Plans that reflect a collective vision for the future social, physical and economic development of their area. Mechanisms should be established for these Community Plans to be formally integrated into the statutory planning processes.

The systems of appeals must also be addressed. Currently only the developer has the right to appeal a planning decision. This has been a major factor in undermining community confidence in the system. The introduction of a third party right of appeal has worked well in other countries is required if a sense of fairness is to be restored to our planning system.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Since the publication of the Christie Commission's report in 2011, there has been a broad consensus that the way in which Scotland's public services are currently organised is no longer fit-for-purpose.

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the unceasing drive towards efficiency, scale and standardisation in public services is part of the problem, not the solution. We believe scaling up leads to ever more 'failure demand', diverting resources to unproductive ends and driving costs ever higher. Bigger is not always better.

We argue for the alternative: smaller, localised and personalised services that help people to help themselves, prevent problems arising in the first place and reduce the need for costly downstream intervention. This means greater local variation and accountability for service delivery. It also means local people being active and equal partners in the design and delivery of services.

Community groups and organisations are often best placed to take responsibility for delegated budgets and services, delivering the type of services that are most relevant to local people. This will require both the community sector and many parts of the public sector to develop a greater level of mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Progress towards this goal will require a new compact based on mutual respect and trust, in which public authorities acknowledge the independence of the community sector. They must work with and through community organisations where interests converge, becoming involved in collaborative processes of leadership and learning exchange, putting in place measures to ensure that the transfer of power and services are considered as the default option, and accepting the value of small and localised service solutions. On our part, we must grow in confidence and competence to earn that trust.



We call for the following changes:

2A. COMMISSIONING ARRANGEMENTS THAT ARE 'LOCAL BY DEFAULT'

While the state must continue to play the main role in delivering public services, we believe that many existing public services can be more effectively delivered by the community sector. To date there has been insufficient progress on the redesign of commissioning processes, meaning that systems are still not capable of making the most of a more diverse base of competent, small and locally trusted community providers. Again, the new rights contained in the Community Empowerment Act – particularly the Right to Participate – may have an important contribution to make in this respect.

We call for **commissioning arrangements with a stronger presumption in favour of delivery by community-based providers**. We need clearer guidance and more active encouragement for communities to challenge the status quo and run local services themselves. When going about the commissioning of services, opportunities must be taken to: involve community sector partners from the outset in designing service requirements; follow a simplified procurement process that is less demanding on those taking part; and actively support the development of community sector capacity to help capitalise on opportunities.

2B. BESPOKE BUSINESS SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY AND CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISES

It is now time to give people the opportunity to shape how their local economy and services develop. In large part, this is about encouraging locally controlled and sustainable ways of organising economic activity – local energy, local banking, local currencies, local shops, and so on. We believe that this diverse and small-scale activity can forge economic resilience while at the same time lead to better neighbourhood services.

Almost one-quarter of all social enterprises in the country today operate as part of our community sector. They are democratically-owned and manage a wide range of important local amenities and services (community shops, pubs, post offices, village halls, childcare services, community transport, etc.). However, this widespread and small-scale community and co-operative enterprise activity tends to sit under the radar and often does not attract the type of bespoke support which is needed. In particular, national social enterprise programmes have not served the community sector well, given their focus on individual social entrepreneurs or larger social enterprises seeking to grow beyond local markets.

We call for a **proportionate re-orientation of the national social enterprise support programmes towards the needs of community and co-operative enterprises**. This requires specialist support that is better tailored to the needs of these small-scale but often complex enterprises with their distinctive democratic and co-operative forms of ownership.

2C. TRANSFER OF PUBLIC ASSETS TO COMMUNITIES

The emerging legislative framework of community empowerment and land reform presents a range of new possibilities for communities to take over the management and ownership of many public assets. The underlying purpose is that these transfers should generate significant additional public benefits.

These opportunities will only be realised if significant measures are put in place to raise awareness of these new rights within

communities, accompanied by **appropriate levels of advice and support**. Community asset transfer policies at a local level will have to translate into practice, with ways found to deliver more quickly and creatively this reconfiguration of the public estate (e.g. multiple asset transfer, the ‘meanwhile’ and temporary use of spaces and buildings). In addition, there needs to be a further expansion of the capital funding required to enable the buyout and further development of land and buildings, including grant funding (feasibility, technical aid, and funds for acquisition) and the continued growth of Community Shares schemes.



COMMUNITY SECTOR

For many years, and particularly since the financial crisis, there has been a growing awareness that centrally driven, top down economic and social regeneration policies have failed many communities and in particular, the most disadvantaged parts of the country. A profound shift in emphasis is required that recognises the intrinsic value of supporting local economies and promoting **localised solutions** to national challenges such as those related to food or energy security, the provision of affordable housing or the transition to a low carbon economy.

Not all communities are equal in terms of resources and the spread of skills and capacity to exploit them. Often some form of **capacity building** work is required that strengthens the leadership and ability of community organisations to define and achieve their objectives, initiate community activity and take control of some local assets and services.

More often than not, at the heart of any empowered community is a **community-owned asset** such as land or a building. This not only strengthens the 'balance sheet' of the community

and generates an independent, locally controlled income stream, but also instils the confidence and energy which goes alongside a successful community enterprise. However, in too many parts of the country we have failed to ensure that assets work for the common good. We see land blighted or not being put to productive use, buildings that are derelict or underused and natural resources exploited inappropriately or for commercial gain.

One of the most common characteristics of empowered communities is the presence of an organisation (sometimes more than one who choose to work together) that local people recognise as providing a degree of local leadership, stability and a point of reference for external parties to relate to. They are able to offer support to other, less formally organised local groups. In recent years we have come to conceptualise these organisations as **community anchors**. While these anchor organisations have recently been afforded public policy recognition and support (particularly in relation to community-led regeneration), their full potential has yet to be realised.



We call for the following changes:

3A. SUSTAINED INVESTMENT IN A GROWING DIVERSITY OF COMMUNITY ANCHOR ORGANISATIONS

The potential of community anchor organisations to provide leadership and to animate community action, and to drive forward programmes of local improvement has started to be realised. Sustained attention must now be given to nurturing and supporting the growth of anchor organisations, in all their variety, in every community.

This requires long-term and substantial government investment into anchor organisations to ensure they have the stability and capacity required for the development and delivery of long term local planning.

We therefore wish to see a significant expansion of the scope and range of the current **Strengthening Communities programmes** – investing in the capacity, governance, assets and resources of a wider range of community-owned organisations across the country.

3B. A NATIONAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

All successful and empowered communities are characterised by the passion and commitment of a small core of local people. These people are found in their thousands across Scotland, but so often go unrecognised and as a consequence, unsupported. They are a fragile but crucially important resource that must be nurtured and developed.

We call for a **new national initiative that will provide an effective network of encouragement, learning and support for these community leaders**. This initiative would start by developing a greater understanding

of how they become involved, what works and why, identifying the core skills, experiences and competencies of those who successfully lead change in their communities. This would stimulate proposals for a national programme for community activists and community development workers, aimed at sustaining and enhancing their impact.

3C. SUPPORT FOR SELF-ORGANISING COMMUNITY NETWORKS

The past two decades have seen the formation of several self-organising national networks across the community sector. They have connected up community groups with broadly similar interests (renewable energy, reuse and recycling groups, voluntary arts, transport, etc.) and have brought a collective strength and influence in these areas. While many of these networks have become highly specialised in terms of the technical knowledge and advice they can offer, most operate on very limited resources and now struggle to meet the growing demands of their members. Significant opportunities are therefore being missed to join up and grow important parts of the community sector and to build its capacity to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

There should be significant and long-term investment in an agreed number of national networks. These offer an important conduit for engaging with the various parts of the community sector and for delivering on Scottish Government's public policy commitments. Guaranteed funding over a sensible timeframe is needed to create capacity; to inform and inspire new community activity; to better connect up the work of existing community groups, and support wider learning and exchange activities; to offer more widespread advice and support; and to contribute more fully to cross-cutting policy work. Investment in these community networks will help groups to help each other and achieve a greater collective impact.

3D. ESTABLISH A NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

There are many communities that clearly require an additional investment of resources in order to increase local levels of capacity. However, as things stand, there is no coherent approach across the country that is fit for this purpose. Historically, Community Learning and Development (CLD) services, based within local authorities, have been charged with this task. This resource has been systematically eroded over many years to the point where it is scarcely able to support even a minimal level of community engagement with public sector partners, let alone take on board the emerging empowerment agenda. In some parts of the country some infrastructure to support community development has evolved but this is largely piecemeal and many communities have been left to flounder.

As a first step, we propose a **thorough reappraisal of what communities require in order to build the capacity to meet the challenges that lie ahead.** This would involve an audit of all relevant government departments, public bodies and community sector intermediaries to identify where the resource and responsibility for this important task currently resides, and where it would be best located going forward. The resulting programme of support should, at a minimum, include a significantly expanded programme of action-learning visits, knowledge exchange and peer support that is organised by and for the sector itself. It should provide community organisations with the opportunity to employ their own development workers or advisors. While this work to build the capacity of communities is best delivered by communities themselves, ways should also be found to re-orientate or redeploy professional ‘community engagement’ workers towards tasks that will foster more independent and capable organisations.



Conclusion: A Partnership of Equals

We have developed an ambitious and challenging document that proposes a number of measures that have serious implications for government policy, action and resources. We believe that the changes that we propose are necessary if we are to create the conditions for genuine and widespread community empowerment in Scotland and if we are to realise the full potential of Scotland's community sector.

Despite the current constraints on public finances, we believe there has never been a more promising time to begin this process and propose that a new spirit of equal partnership should determine the relationship between government, both national and local, and the community sector.

Guided by the principles set out in this document, and informed by its priorities, we urge our partners to come together to agree and deliver on a long-term, comprehensive plan to support the sustainable growth and future development of Scotland's community sector.

The country's leading community-based networks have joined together as the Scottish Community Alliance to campaign for a strong and independent community sector in Scotland