



# Rethinking Scotland: Take action to include more voices in policy-making in Scotland



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our thanks to the design team: Manira Ahmad, Iqbal Singh Bedi, Fiona Garven, Lindsay Graham and Leah Lockhart and to all those who attended the events and provided feedback.



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# If not now, when?



COVID-19 is a tragedy that continues to affect all aspects of our lives, families, communities and society. The vaccination process needs to be completed, and the ongoing impact mitigated, but, alongside that, it is important to think about how Scotland might recover. The decisions made now by governments (local and national), businesses, funders, charities and community groups will affect the trajectory and nature of our individual, community and national wellbeing for many years.

Disasters can lead people and societies to assess what matters and what needs to be done to tackle deep-rooted problems and build resilience to future shocks. Carnegie UK have reported elsewhere on how public services have shifted their behaviours in light of the pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Since the pandemic began in early 2020 we have seen many communities step up to look after neighbours, friends, and people in their peer groups close and far. They have recognised needs and responded to them in a personal way, supporting people with dignity and respect. As *Democracy Matters* found out, people want 'a real shift in power in favour of communities'<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time mass movements like *Black Lives Matter* or *Everyone's Invited* have brought injustice and inequality to the forefront of media and politics. Indeed, whilst the pandemic has affected us all, there is evidence that the pandemic has disproportionately affected certain groups, including ethnic minorities, women and those living in poverty, deepening existing inequalities. There now appears to be a greater awareness of the inequalities that exist around us in mainstream culture<sup>3</sup>.

Through our work at Carnegie UK, we have heard people talking about how the COVID-19 crisis could change our collective priorities for the better. We wanted to explore priorities for recovery in Scotland. The scale of the challenges, and our fresh experience of collaboration through the crisis, made it imperative to seek a diversity of views in an open and inclusive way.

To facilitate this, we ran online conversations about *Rethinking Scotland for the medium-term recovery*. First, we asked a small design team<sup>4</sup> what they thought these conversations should focus on and how we might hold them. They said, and we have heard elsewhere, that in Scotland we have positive policies, under the umbrella of the *National Performance Framework*, aimed at national wellbeing. However, although the Scottish policy landscape is a strong framework for improving wellbeing, those of us involved in designing and delivering public services often struggle to translate this into mainstream practice, to improve outcomes for individuals, communities, and society. If Scotland is to realise the potential of a wellbeing approach, now is the time to change this and to harness people's enthusiasm to change to a fairer society.

1 Coutts, P et al. (2020) Pooling Together Carnegie UK Trust available at <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/pooling-together-how-community-hubs-have-responded-to-the-covid-19-emergency/>

2 Scottish Government (March 2021), *Democracy Matters Phase 2*. P8

3 An example of this is the discussions of the Citizen Assembly Scotland, available at <https://t.co/jxxnAUUc9P>

4 Our thanks go to Manira Ahmad, Iqbal Singh Bedi, Fiona Garven, Lindsay Graham and Leah Lockhart

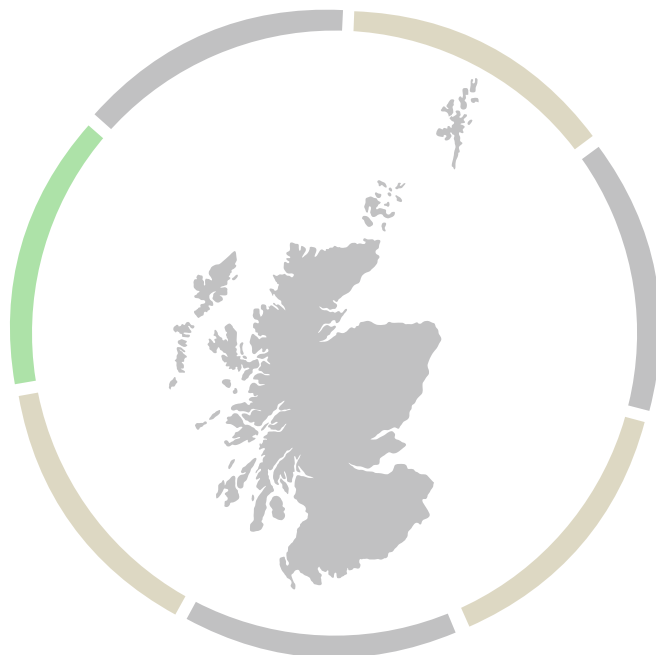
Using these reflections, we set up online conversations to:

- Contribute to the development of a shared understanding of the challenges to living well together in Scotland, ('wellbeing'), and the opportunities for change
- Encourage a sense of 'if not us, then who?' among the participants. While some changes will rely on decision making by statutory bodies, others can be achieved by individuals, communities, businesses and civil society organisations.
- Contribute to shaping policy and supporting the implementation of change during the recovery phase and in the longer-term future.

We asked for people's views on what needs to happen and who needs to act to put some of Scotland's big ideas into practice. We held two online conversations on *Building a Wellbeing Economy* (in September and October 2020) and one conversation on *Including more diverse voices in policy-making* (in November). We sought to broaden participation by inviting organisations Carnegie UK had not engaged with previously, particularly those who work with (or have members from) groups that have traditionally been excluded from policy-making conversations.

Over 60 people took part in the conversations, with many attending more than one session. During the conversations, participants worked in small groups and note-takers from the Trust recorded key points and supported note writing on an interactive online whiteboard (Jamboard). Later notes were synthesised and used to write this report.

The report captures the participants' ideas on actions for policymakers.



# What we heard



In the conversations, we asked people what a wellbeing economy meant to their organisations and we received a strong steer on both what it would look like and how to achieve it. People were clear that a society with a wellbeing economy would include those who have previously been marginalised. People described a move to a wellbeing economy as involving a switch of focus away from people who have been served in the past to those who have been underserved. A society with a wellbeing economy will benefit everyone including future generations. This will include those who have protected characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age and disability as well as those who face exclusion due to characteristics such as poverty or geography. For Scotland to flourish, we need to ensure that people, in all their diversity are engaged and included in the decisions made on their behalf.

Throughout the *Rethinking Scotland* conversations, there was an aspiration for the reflection and learning from the pandemic to quickly lead to change, because the rhetoric of wellbeing in Scotland has yet to be matched by significant action. The purpose of government articulated in the *National Performance Framework*, i.e. to achieve 'opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish' was considered a moral responsibility to which the Scottish Government should be held to account<sup>5</sup>.

To achieve a wellbeing economy, it was felt that Scotland urgently needs to develop and mainstream participatory working and inclusive policy-making<sup>6</sup>. In terms of service design, delivery and evaluation that means 'doing with' not 'doing to' people who need care and support. It also means enabling communities to have a greater say over issues that affect them. This requires changing from a situation where power is largely given from the centre to communities to a subsidiary mindset, where power begins with communities.

People in the conversations shared some ideas on how policymakers and politicians could speed up the development of a wellbeing economy through inclusive policy-making. That means more people directly participating in democracy, as we have seen with the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland<sup>7</sup>, the Climate Assembly UK<sup>8</sup> and participatory budgeting initiatives in Scotland, and in cities such as Paris or Madrid.

**The overall message from our sessions was that building national wellbeing cannot be done to people, businesses and communities; it has to be done with them.**

In our own work, we have been building our knowledge on Democratic Wellbeing – reflecting that this essential part of social progress is too easily left out of wellbeing frameworks. We believe there is now enough evidence to show that without strong democratic wellbeing, the other strands of wellbeing (Social, Economic and Environmental) also struggle to progress<sup>9</sup>.

5 Quote from The National Performance Framework available at <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

6 For detailed guidance on how to move towards a wellbeing economy, see Wellbeing Alliance (March 2021) Wellbeing Policy Design Guide, available at [https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/Wellbeing-Economy-Policy-Design-Guide\\_Mar17\\_FINAL.pdf](https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/Wellbeing-Economy-Policy-Design-Guide_Mar17_FINAL.pdf)

7 <https://www.citizensassembly.scot/>

8 <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/committees/climate-assembly-uk/>

9 Legatum Institute Foundation, 2019. The Legatum Prosperity Index: A tool for transformation, London: Legatum Institute Foundation.



# The actions required



Participants in the conversations argued that a wellbeing economy requires a new settlement between representative and participatory democracy and for citizens in Scotland to have greater control over decisions made on their behalf. This requires organisations in public life to recognise the power relations that militate against a wide range of citizens being actively involved in policy-making. It requires local and national government to transform in order to engage more citizens more often in decision-making.

In our discussions we identified the following priority actions to facilitate this shift in culture and behaviours:

- Address power imbalances in the policy-making process
- Co-produce principles to transform who is involved in policy-making
- Develop an infrastructure for engagement

### Address power imbalances in the policy-making process

Policymakers and politicians should recognise and tackle structural inequities in policy processes. For example, in Scotland, as elsewhere, we need to better understand the racialisation of people in policy-making to increase opportunities for people of all ethnicities to engage in the policy process. Changing the nature of policy-making in Scotland requires a transformational shift in the terms of engagement. There is a need for civil society and public sector organisations to better understand how others, external to their institutions, feel that they are treated. There was recognition that concerted efforts need to be undertaken to reach and include the lived experience and views of those with protected characteristics/from diverse backgrounds.

All those involved in the policy-making process should recognise that formal engagement or consultation with communities flowing from larger organisations is often skewed. Professionals are paid for their engagement in the policy-making process, and their time is valued financially. Smaller community organisations and individual citizens are not paid for their participation. This creates an inherent power imbalance. The protocols and ways of working (such as the language used, options for participation or times and locations of meetings) can sometimes be constructed for the convenience of the paid professionals, creating barriers to communities to be heard in the policy-making process. Lack of remuneration is especially problematic where a person, or group of people, are sharing traumatic or difficult lived experiences, and where these are voices that are not usually heard.

Where private citizens have taken part in a policy process, they frequently feel it has not made any difference. This is often because they are not involved in setting the agenda, making the recommendations for action or shaping the response, for example through the design of new interventions. Policymakers take information, analyse it, make recommendations and prioritise (or not) actions without seeking the continued input of the people who initially shared their knowledge. Participants describe this experience as being 'extractive'. One participant in the conversations said that people who take part in

policy-making want to 'see their fingerprints' on policy from beginning to end. Another participant reflected that it is important for policymakers to listen to what people say about the process - especially if they are from communities that policymakers have struggled to reach out to and engage in the past.

The conversations highlighted a tendency in policy-making to consider people and communities, especially those with protected characteristics, simplistically. People and communities are not unidimensional. The tendency to view citizens and service users in one dimension has led to services clustering people, which force some into a community that is not of their choosing.

To engage more deeply with people, policymakers need to start from a person-centred perspective. This is in line with the Commission for Racial Equality and Rights which highlights the importance of understanding individual perspectives, rather than stereotyping<sup>10</sup>. To address power imbalances through greater diversity in policy-making, policymakers should recognise that characteristics such as experiences of poverty, gender, ethnicity and ill-health intersect.

## Principles to transform who is involved in policy-making

The first step in transforming engagement in policy-making is to consider who is, and is not, already involved in these interactions, and plan how to engage meaningfully with people who are not the usual participating stakeholder groups. Some participants also raised the point that there needs to be better accountability and consequences for organisations or policymakers in terms of failure to engage diverse voices and be truly inclusive in their processes.

It was felt that policymakers needed to make more of an effort to go to where people are – literally and metaphorically. While some participatory practices have come a long way from merely asking people to respond to a survey or consultation, this change is not being implemented evenly or with sufficient speed. Some participants also raised the point that there needs to be better accountability and consequences for organisations or policymakers in terms of failure to engage diverse voices and be truly inclusive in their processes.

Examples of emerging good practice in Scottish participatory policy-making involve working with people who have lived experience. In *All in for Change*<sup>11</sup> both frontline service providers and people with experience have been engaged in homelessness policy-making. This has been supported by specialists in community engagement and co-production (the Scottish Community Development Centre). The Scottish Government's Social Security Experience Panels<sup>12</sup> have involved people with experience of the social security system in research and user testing around Social Security in Scotland. Client

10 Commission for Racial Equality and Rights in *Promoting Good Relations New Approaches New Solutions* <https://www.equallyours.org.uk/coalition-for-racial-equality-and-rights-promoting-good-relations/> recommends working with an 'intercultural approach', on how communities and individuals can best interact and live together.

11 <https://cyrenians.scot/news/181-one-year-of-all-in-for-change>

12 <https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-experience-panels-publications/>

panels including users are forming to help improve the new system. The *Independent Care Review*<sup>13</sup> involved review groups of 120 people, more than half of whom had lived experience. Time, effort, thought and investment is required for these processes to be done well – which requires leadership if we are serious about real change. Furthermore, it was raised that in terms of engaging with certain diverse groups, engagement simply at the point of participatory policy-making may be inadequate: what is required was ongoing engagement and liaison, relationship building, rather than parachuting into a community or group for a specific consultation. The quality of the work will reflect the investment we collectively are willing put into it.

But for every example of good practice given, more were offered that were ‘business as usual’ approaches to public consultation. The *Rethinking Scotland* conversations suggested that Scottish Government and local authorities need to develop principles for engagement with citizens in line with the commitment to developing a Participation Framework in the Scotland’s Open Government Action Plan<sup>14</sup>. As the plan points out, developing these principles should reflect the existing *National Standards on Engagement*<sup>15</sup>. The task is not only to develop the principles, but to act on them.

The conversations highlighted some good practice relevant to the development of principles:

- Involve people in all parts of the policy-making or service design process, including creating time and space to feed back what has been heard. Ensure the engagement is an iterative process; test these experiences and views with others to ensure what you are extrapolating is an accurate reflection.
- Make sure people understand why they are being asked to take part. Communicate clearly the rationale, the approach and what will happen as a result.
- Reach out to seldom heard voices, build their capacity to engage fully and with ease and listen carefully. This can include adapting processes to suit people’s communication preferences and better hear their stories. Having to use formal paperwork often causes concerns and prevents people from taking part.
- Go beyond silos and treat people as “whole persons”; ask people with protected characteristics about more than simply policy which affects that characteristic or health condition.
- Support people to be involved in the process by ensuring that engagement meets their practical and emotional needs, as well as building their capacity to engage. For example, keep events light and fun, and alongside the engagement process offer people help with the things that matter to them. Consider carefully what financial compensation might be appropriate.

13 <https://www.carereview.scot/>

14 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-open-government-action-plan-2018-20-detailed-commitments/pages/3/>

15 Scottish Community Development Centre National Standards on Engagement available at <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards/>

- Make sure there is enough time for people to create lasting personal connections and trust each other. Engagement should respect the emotional content of conversations as a valid form of knowledge.
- Create medium to long-term feedback loops so people are aware of what changes are being made, including explanations where the decision taken was not in line with the views expressed through engagement.

## Infrastructure for engagement

In this shift to a more collaborative and empowering model of public engagement in policy-making, civil society and the public sector need to invest actively in the infrastructure for engagement by curating safe space, further developing professional skills in participatory processes, and deepening open government. Some participants noted that making a space feel safe for a diverse group of people is not without its challenges: what can feel safe for one group may not feel safe or inclusive for another.

The development of safe spaces to engage, where people can openly express their views without fear of saying the wrong thing or being judged, is essential for more deliberative discussion. A consultation method may work well to identify whether people agree or disagree, but is not designed to support deeper understanding between groups or create compromises. Having safe spaces can encourage 'difficult' and challenging conversations that participants might perceive as impossible elsewhere. But these are precisely the types of conversation we need to have to unpick the wicked issues facing Scottish policy. These conversations need to be managed ethically, for example by ensuring the necessary psychological support is available.

Listening to a diversity of voices, engaging people who have been unheard previously, creating an inclusive environment and reconciling the differences between communities of interest, place and practice, require specific skills. Yet, over recent decades local capacity to support and engage communities has been eroded. To develop inclusive policy-making for a wellbeing economy, governments and funders of all sizes need to invest in community development and community autonomy.

Conversation participants said that governments need to change to be more open and hence more accountable. Mechanisms and support should be developed to enable citizens to get involved in and understand the system. Existing processes for scrutiny and accountability need to be adapted to ensure that anyone can access the assessments in a clear and straightforward format.

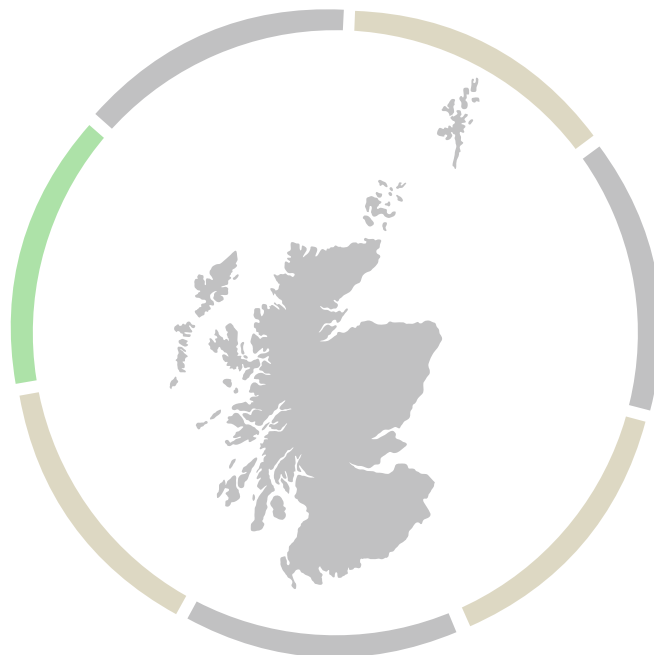
# Final remarks



In our conversations we identified the need to move beyond 'initiatives' and towards deeper public participation practices that become embedded in policy-making systems. The conversations repeatedly revealed that a key barrier to a better Scotland is that people do not feel their views, interests and experiences are represented in policy-making. We heard that lack of communication and knowledge sharing from power holding organisations is an impediment to the meaningful engagement needed for a wellbeing economy.

We have moved far from the early 2000s conversations on consultation fatigue, and we know that the people of Scotland are interested in contributing to collective wellbeing. We heard people saying that they want to be more actively involved in decisions made about their lives, their communities and the country as a whole. We heard there is a need for systems that put community interests centre stage and give citizens the space to act more autonomously.

The conversations, not for the first time, highlighted that engagement that is fully inclusive and representative of Scotland's diverse population requires an investment of time and resources. The Scottish Government should prioritise this investment, above other activities and spending. It should also reflect and act on ways in which it creates barriers to a wellbeing economy through funding structures and distribution of funding to third sector organisations. Without making some foundational changes, the Government will struggle to achieve current commitments to improving the wellbeing of Scotland.



The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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