

“IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS”

Approaches to engaging people with direct experience of poverty in the development of local child poverty policy



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The Poverty Alliance is Scotland's anti-poverty network. Together with our members, we influence policy and practice, support communities to challenge poverty, provide evidence through research and build public support for the solutions to tackle poverty. Our members include grassroots community groups, academics, large national NGOs, voluntary organisations, statutory organisations, trade unions, and faith groups.

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About Get Heard Scotland

Get Heard Scotland (GHS) is a programme coordinated by the Poverty Alliance and funded by the Scottish Government as part of Every Child Every Chance, the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan. GHS is designed to help people on low incomes get their voices heard on the policies and decisions that most impact their lives and their communities. Very simply, it aims to find out – by holding discussions with people affected by poverty across Scotland and with the organisations that support people affected by poverty – what is working in their community, what is not working, and what needs to change to better support people living on low incomes and loosen the grip of poverty on their lives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How was this report produced?

Researched and written in 2021 by Sarah Stocks of Northern Star for Poverty Alliance, this report for the Get Heard Scotland project collates learning and practical approaches to include people with lived experience of poverty in local policy development. As a change-focused piece of research, this project analysed data from local child poverty action reports across Scotland and from 30 interviews with community activists, their supporters and policy makers. We applied these insights through focused development work with Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Councils, to increase the channels for lived experience to influence their child poverty policy.

What are the key principles of effective participation in making policy?

Participatory approaches must include an understanding of other dimensions of poverty beyond money. Participation is not just about being heard – for expressing yourself is not the same as having the agency to make a difference to your situation. Whilst participatory approaches must include listening to people, they should also aim to make a difference to those people. Participation needs us to make a long-term commitment towards increasing equality of marginalised people. For institutions like local authorities who are trying to deepen the influence on policy of people who experience poverty, increasing meaningful influence is still worthwhile, even if there are some areas that this influence does not reach.

What are the outcomes of effective participation? We can think of good participation as producing three changes: knowledge, action and consciousness.

Greater knowledge means including local people's perspectives alongside the statistical data about poverty that is normally gathered by decision-makers. Action in the context of policy means solving underlying problems rather than just letting people feel heard: looking to change policy as well as adjust the way services are delivered. Consciousness is when policy makers, people experiencing poverty and the wider population reflect on their own attitudes, coming to a fuller understanding of their and others' place in the community, becoming more aware of different relationships of power. We should not expect that any one participatory method could possibly include every person and fully develop knowledge, action and consciousness. Instead, we should look to develop programmes of participation which include a number of different interventions in concert, allowing people with different needs to influence through different channels.

Where is participation different from consultation? Good participative practice moves on from just asking people to give us their opinion, to enabling them to shape decision-makers' opinions in the room, to being in the room where that decision making happens and being part of those decisions. One-time contributions from consultation necessarily cannot allow individuals to weigh up alternatives or combine features of different ideas into a coherent approach. We must privilege relationship over hearing lived experience. This means we should involve people, not just gather their stories. The outcomes of this type of engagement are not merely an understanding of others' opinions, but the relationships that they build, the opinions that they evolve, and the contribution that they make to changing policy.

What are some practical examples of participation in local policy making relevant to the development of local child poverty action reports?

- Relational learning pairs: decision-makers meeting 1-1 with people with lived experience of low income. Participants are matched into learning pairs which meet regularly, with one partner a professional from the council, and another a person from the community with lived experience of low income.
- Participatory research leading to service review: working with the support of skilled facilitators and researchers, ordinary people with lived experience work as peer researchers, gather evidence from others in their situation, and then begin a working group with decisionmakers to collectively revise policy and service in response to findings.
- Mini public: a deliberative, short term process involving a representative group of local people with experience of poverty weighing up evidence, leading to recommendations for further work. Mini publics are broken up into two or more interactive, discursive sessions, which are designed to give participants enough time to talk about and understand the issue (dialogue) and then come up with suggestions on how to respond to the issue (deliberation).
- Online forum: this gathers together people with experience of poverty and the desire to contribute their experience. They may use a private group in a social network, or in a bespoke platform. A facilitator engages with people around particular topics, posing questions and gathering views, which may be general experience or might be opinions about a service.
- Participative review of policy: people with experience of poverty spend time with a worker in interviews and a focus group. The aim of the interviews is to review the Local Child Poverty Action Report and make recommendations about where the strategy should be changed.
- Panel: a group of people with experience of low income and willingness to advocate for change, act as an advisory panel for decision-makers. Typically an advisory panel would provide comment on new ideas and provide an opportunity to collaborate with grassroots activists, acting as a sounding board for a decision-making group.
- Poverty Truth commissions: these examine inequality and experiences of poverty, involving people with experience of poverty alongside commissioners with decision-making power, experience in business, or academic interests. The emphasis in Poverty Truth Commissions is on understanding the perspectives of people with experience of poverty, and connecting their expertise to decisionmakers, as a way of clarifying and tackling issues of poverty as they manifest in a defined local area.
- Deliberative participatory budgeting models: create space for participants to talk about the problems they are experiencing and evolve solutions together. This is a longer term process, rather than a short term competition, with participants gathering to discuss their priorities and evolve ideas, over a yearly funding cycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for local authorities to help deepen their participatory practice:

- Ensure that participation leads your institution further than simply better listening, to changing what they do.
- Look to increase meaningful influence of people with lived experience of poverty in policy development, even if there are some areas that this influence does not reach.
- Design programmes of participation which include a number of different interventions, allowing people with different needs to influence through different channels.
- Work towards approaches which bring together sustained groups of local people with direct experience of poverty, rather than relying only on third sector organisations to share their views.
- Resource participation through funding participatory processes that are evolved and staffed by local community connectors who are trusted by citizens, rather than asking these groups to supply their views through consultations.
- Provide independent facilitation and support for groups of citizens to meet together as activists over the long term, beyond any time-limited processes.
- Recognise the importance of dialogue and group reflection, as opposed to relying solely on bilateral or one-way communication between citizens and councils. This is because policy is made through refining ideas by different parties over time.
- Actively make connections between each piece of participatory work – for example, encouraging people to consider further engagement by taking part in a follow-up group or forum, or showing people how there's been change over time, relating today's recommendations to earlier results of other processes.
- Honour the person who brings their lived experience and engage with them as a whole being with influence, not solely as a story.
- Give experts by experience the space to build relationships with people involved in decision-making.
- Put in place helpers who can bridge the gap between those who have learnt how to navigate through the institution, and citizens who have only just stepped into the space of local government.
- Consider setting up partnership with a national organisation a step removed from local concerns in order to deepen and sustain engagement with citizens.
- Challenge yourself to give more weight to lived experience. If we consider lived experience as either partial and biased, or as inauthentic and polished, we allow no space for lived experience to ever be recognised as true.
- Focus on building up relationships with people rather than extracting participants for a new initiative.
- Participation should not be merely consultative but influential; rather than seeing engagement as taking on views of people once at the beginning of a project, set up opportunities to work through things with reference to them as an equal partner, over time.

How to run participatory approaches well in the room where they happen:

- Make pathways to changing policy visible and real for participants as well as decision makers.
- Take care to feed back to people how far their influence has reached into the institution as they may not be in those rooms to see for themselves.
- Work to decode practices which can be opaque to people outside the council – such as meeting bureaucracy and wordy papers.
- When bringing people into decision maker's spaces, consider the ratio of lived experience to decision makers and make sure there is a critical mass of people from marginalised social groups to offer support to one another. If they are in the minority, they may not be seen by themselves or others as welcome or genuinely equal partners, and their voice may be isolated.
- Pay for time of people giving their lived experience, either as honorarium for attendance at processes, or by setting up contracts as consultants or part-time workers.
- Ensure that helpers and people with lived experience have time to affect the agenda of meetings and the way documents are phrased and discussed, and put time in to brief lived experience members ahead of meetings.
- Dedicate time at meetings to setting ground rules around sharing lived experience. For example, participants are not required to share personal stories and where they do, all participants commit to listening to understand, not to challenge or respond. It may be helpful to set expectations that certain agenda items are about understanding experience and don't require decision makers to defend their practice but to listen in order to understand. Other items later in the same meeting may be to formulate action and these are the space to debate or interrogate the practice of the council, but not to interrogate individuals' lives.
- Think about those who are absent as well as present. Consider where your approach doesn't have participants who are, for example, parents of young children, or have English as a second language, or are learning disabled. How will this approach link with others to understand the lived experience of these groups?
- Give a role to professionals to broker the knowledge to their colleagues who are not in the room; and to bring back to participants an account of how this knowledge has influenced others.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the Get Heard Scotland project, Poverty Alliance commissioned Sarah Stocks of Northern Star to research potential approaches to engaging people with direct experience of poverty in the development of local child poverty policy. This work was intended to complement and add to the Poverty Alliance's existing programme of work to engage with people living on low incomes and feed this experience into local and national policy.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act sets ambitious targets for poverty reduction on Scotland by 2030. Whilst the actions of Scottish and UK government will be crucial to achieving these targets, the efforts of Local Authorities will also be critical. This is recognised in the Act whereby Local

Authorities have the responsibility, in partnership with Health Boards, to produce annual Child Poverty Action Reports. Throughout the development of these plans, at both the national and local levels, there is an expectation that there will be engagement with the 3rd sector and with people who have experienced poverty.

This report reflects the approach of Get Heard Scotland through two strands: by gathering first-hand knowledge from community activists, their supporters and policy makers about practical approaches to include people with lived experience of poverty in policy development; and secondly by working with Renfrewshire and Inverclyde local authorities to increase the channels for lived experience to influence their child poverty policy.

Our approach to this research

As a change-focused piece of research, this project analysed data from people involved in different roles of engaging with lived experience of poverty, and also attempted to apply these insights through focused development work in the particular contexts of Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Councils.

Here's some of what we did to gather data:

- reviewing all available local child poverty action reports for the 32 local authorities. Some authorities had produced reports for both 2018-19 and 2019-20 periods; for others Covid had delayed the second report which was not available for the period of this research.
- Analysing examples of good practice identified by the Poverty and Inequality Commission, Improvement Service Scotland and the Poverty Alliance, such as (See Poverty and Inequality Commission's review of the Local Child Poverty Action Reports 2019).
- Reviewing published and unpublished reports of participatory approaches to local policy making in Scotland. This included evaluations and case studies produced by third sector organisations, local authorities and health boards in Scotland.
- Interviewing six community activists who had taken part in local and national examples of lived experience testimony.
- Interviewing professionals from a number of voluntary organisations and statutory agencies, nine involved in policy and six in frontline interventions.
- Interviewing nine local council professionals in community engagement roles or policy development functions.

HOW COULD WE APPLY PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATION TO INCREASE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION BY PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE OF LOW INCOMES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD POVERTY ACTION REPORTS?

Participation is a recognition that people experiencing a society which systematically disrespects them, have the right, just as much as people respected in society, to have influence over decisions that affect their lives. Participation is a fundamental freedom underlying all human rights, and is necessary for us to live with dignity, and to see our rights realised equally in communities. One of the core expressions of participation is derived from justice-oriented civil rights movements: “nothing about us without us”, a rallying cry developed by South African disability rights advocates. Participation is a way to set right the conditions of society for some of its members who are stigmatised according to one or many socially-determined labels: of race, of disability, of sexuality, and of poverty.

Attempts to increase the influence of people in the services and organisations which surround their communities, must take into account power differentials between marginalised people in communities and those governing them. Poverty is expressed not only as a lack of financial means. Poverty is also manifest in powerlessness over

decisions, over how people think of you, over your control of your own time. This means that participatory approaches, to be effective, must include an understanding of other dimensions of power beyond money. Someone taking part in a participatory approach organised by a local authority may have to negotiate a number of different inequalities; they may not be on equal terms with the people organising the approach, and this can lead to mistrust and to significant harm unless the organisers appreciate how power manifests in different forms for different people.

One key aspect of power is agency. Participation is not just about being heard – for expressing yourself is not the same as having the agency to make a difference to your situation. Whilst participatory approaches must include listening to people, they should also aim to make a difference to those people. This means that those who commission community engagement should also look to their own power over decisions, and consider whether what they hear makes any difference to what they do. For large institutions, participation must lead the institution beyond simply better listening, to changing what they do.

We should consider participation as one attempt to address injustice, but one that needs us to make a long-term commitment towards increasing equality, rather than something that can be achieved in a single action. Whilst one conception of participation is as a ladder, with different rungs representing a progressively better forms of participation, this framing can imply that there are ideal forms of participation which are the only legitimate aim. Instead we can understand participation as like someone learning a language; a person doesn't learn to speak in a single conversation, but knowing a few more words means they can communicate better, even if they are not totally fluent. For institutions like local authorities who are trying to deepen the influence on policy of people who experience poverty, increasing meaningful influence is still worthwhile, even if there are some areas that this influence does not reach. As What Works Scotland described in their 2017 evidence review about overcoming inequality in community engagement, "the public may well hear and be heard, yet they lack the power to be listened to and influence decisions. They therefore have little chance of challenging or changing things. In some cases there may not be equal power-sharing but there may be real clarity on the level of power-sharing and an understanding of who has a degree of power and control over decisions. This is arguably a key step in a longer process of reform to open up decision-making black boxes."¹

So given this understanding that poverty has more dimensions than money, how can we make participation that's increasingly meaningful to those involved and that's increasingly effective in leading to change? We can think of good participation as holding three things in balance: knowledge, action and consciousness².

Knowledge means including local people's perspectives alongside the statistical data

about poverty that is normally gathered by decision-makers. Understanding how people experience the system of local and national services, is equally important as a source of knowledge that be used to drive change. However this knowledge must go deeper than consultation, which is an approach limited to narrowly defined topics proposed by authorities, and which doesn't attempt to understand the interplay of different services and the broader texture of people's circumstances.

Action requires attention to solving underlying problems rather than just letting people feel heard; looking to change policy as well as adjust the way services are delivered.

Consciousness means recognising that the attitudes held by policy makers, people experiencing poverty and the wider population are significant. A process of reflection may lead to people understanding their place in the community differently, becoming more aware of different relationships of power. Consciousness also means acknowledging the stigma and bias held both by individuals and present in institutions, and that policy makers may learn through relationship with people who experience poverty.

Knowledge, action and consciousness are all integral parts of participation, and a particular participatory method may lean into one of these areas more than the others. We should not expect that any one method could possibly include every individual and address all of these areas. Instead, we should look to develop programmes of participation which include a number of different interventions, allowing people with different needs to influence through different channels. Policy makers should look to build programmes that should balance these three areas, so that people understand the experience of poverty better, that change happens, and that decision-makers learn and are challenged by other people's perspectives.

¹ Lightbody, R. (2017) 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement, Edinburgh: What Works Scotland.

² Brock, Karen, and McGee, Rosemary (2002) *Knowing Poverty: Critical Reflections on Participatory Research and Policy*, Institute of Development Studies

KNOWLEDGE: How do we share and exchange knowledge with people who have lived experience of poverty?

Good participative practice moves on from just asking people to give us their opinion, to enabling them to shape decision-makers' opinions in the room, to being in the room where that decision making happens and being part of those decisions. There are stages on the way to this – perhaps some sort of asynchronous dialogue as is outlined below in Aberdeenshire's online forum; perhaps allowing reflection on previous projects' impact as in the Glasgow appraisal project. Good practice is enabling a broader range of people with experience of poverty to have a greater influence at more stages of the process of decision-making.

Part of allowing decision-making to be influenced by the perspectives of people who have experienced poverty, is the importance of dialogue and group reflection, as opposed to relying solely on bilateral or one-way communication between citizens and councils. This is because policy is made through refining ideas by different parties over time. One-time contributions from consultation necessarily cannot allow individuals to weigh up alternatives or combine features of different ideas into a coherent approach.

Because of stigma, some good practice encourages anonymous contributions from individuals; however there is great value in a group of people who are engaging with one another's experience and refining their views through dialogue with one another. There is a real disadvantage to people who are expressing their reality to power, without solidarity, as the power imbalance between the individuals and the institution is great.

This is one of the reasons why meaningful participation in local authorities needs to deepen from consultation, into dialogue, deliberation and ultimately to influencing decision-making. Participation involves more meaningful, multilateral communication as well as sharing of power.

In the course of this research, community activists as well as professionals in institutions pointed out that each person who takes part in engaging with their local authority has a different experience, is not representative of all other people experiencing poverty, and that there may be different barriers to engagement for different people. So it makes sense to use a variety of different approaches in concert, to ensure that there are the maximum possible range of ways to take part for seldom-heard people, including those with protected characteristics. It is unlikely that any one of the models laid out in this report would be sufficient, on its own, to understand the diversity of experience amongst people who've known poverty.

As part of this, we should also actively make connections between each piece of participatory work – for example, encouraging people to consider further engagement taking part in a follow-up group or forum, or showing people how there's been change over time, relating today's recommendations to earlier results of other processes. This was highlighted by many grassroots organisations and activists as key to ensuring that participation is not tokenistic; if participation is meaningful, it must produce a change or a deeper understanding.

ACTION: How do we ensure people with lived experience of poverty can take action in local government?

When we consider what the local authority can learn from people with experience of poverty, we must privilege relationship over “lived experience”. This means resisting the call to commodifying lived experience as something transactional, in favour of honouring the person and engaging with them as a whole being with influence, not solely as a story. People who’ve been asked to share their story have sometimes felt that it’s only their lived experience that counts – even if the retelling of that story makes them feel vulnerable or reduces them to a particular circumstance. Community activists stressed that the effectiveness of many participatory processes rests on those experts by experience being given the space to build relationships with people involved in decision-making. Whilst lived experience testimony is becoming more highly valued as a means of greater knowledge for professionals, it is important that the stories not be more highly valued than the people who tell these stories. We should involve people, rather than gather stories, and allow the relationships that they build, the opinions that they evolve, the contribution that they make to be the reasons for doing engagement. It’s not enough to just harvest the insight from their story, whilst preventing the person themselves from having a place in deciding how and where that story makes a difference.

There is a confidence and skill required to engage with the bureaucracy of institutions of power. This needs to be acknowledged and supported by councils as they invite people to participate. Councils should ask themselves, how can the local authority decode its opaque practices? Who can bridge the gap between those who have

learnt how to navigate through the institution, and citizens who have only just stepped into the space of local government? Often this needs people who are empathetic and have built relationships with local citizens, who can walk with them as supporters and interpreters, whilst also keeping an eye on the mechanisms of change.

Further to this, it is important to make pathways to changing policy visible and real for participants as well as legislators. It’s not enough for authorities to say “thanks for your input, we will now consider this and make our own decisions.” Local authorities have got to make clear which recommendations they are following up, and why or why not they are being implemented. This should be done both at the wider level of public reports about their engagement activities, and in feedback directly to participants who have contributed their views.

There are different roles that local authorities should consider necessary to make meaningful participation translate into change. The first key role is certainly having independent facilitation and support for a group of activist citizens; secondly there is a role to play as a broker or ally, from within the council, to ensure that some change actually follows. There’s evidence that having partnership with a national organisation who is a step removed from local concerns can deepen and sustain engagement with citizens. For example, Scottish Womens’ Aid carried out research, in partnership with Fife Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership, aimed at improving housing options for women living in Fife. The research was carried out by women who had experienced

homelessness as a result of domestic abuse. Scottish Women's Aid found that women with direct experience of the issue leading the work was a fundamental factor for success in this policy development; but so was having a national organisation, not locally based, which could support women directly alongside Fife Women's Aid. "The difficulty for local groups is the relationship with local authority, because they are often dependent on them for funding: there's a great power differential. Scottish Women's Aid don't

have that power differential; although we have to be careful with local relationships," commented an interviewee from Scottish Women's Aid. Organisations which are not locally based can usefully hold space for local participants, challenge assumptions from local authorities and maintain a focus independent of fluctuations locally. Another community activist with experience in poverty truth commissions highlighted the importance of "a neutral party bringing the two sides together".

CONSCIOUSNESS: How do people relate their place in the world to other people's experience?

Stigma is a real barrier for people to take part in anti-poverty strategy. Whilst we do want to name the reality of poverty in people's lives, for some it can take quite a consciousness-raising process to be able to face the stigma they live under, without personal shame. For example, Aberdeenshire Council found that an online forum which allowed people to contribute anonymously, worked well for people living in small villages who were concerned that taking part in in-person anti-poverty work would be very visible to their neighbours. One community activist who had taken part in a Poverty Truth Commission described how the building up of understanding over time, between commissioners who had experience of poverty and those who were professionals, allowed them the safety to share their experience, in the context of a relationship. Another activist described how in a group of people invited to share their lived experience, some would find it hard to do face to face, and so would use pre-recorded video to share their story, or

ascribe personal details to someone else: "this happened to my sister".

One community engagement professional interviewed believed that stigma can be overcome by in place-based participation which focuses on communities, rather than socio-demographic categories – bringing people along from within their neighbourhood, rather than defining them primarily by their income level. Other research on participatory processes have found the importance of including a critical mass of participants from a marginalised group, to allow their voice to be heard and to be influential in group discussion.³ Confidence can also be an important thing to bolster for participants; facilitators don't just run a participatory process, they can also be supporters for participants, finding ways for them to overcome barriers of status and lack of confidence.

It's also important to consider the value given by the policy-making group to certain forms of communication, such as telling a story⁴.

³ James, M. (2008) Descriptive representation in citizens assemblies. IN Warren, E. And Pearse, H (eds) IN Designing Deliberative Democracy: the British Columbia Citizens Assembly. Cambridge University Press (pp 106-26)

⁴ Smith, G. (2009) Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation. Cambridge University Press.

In a participatory approach, are personal stories given as much weight as very formal reasoning which is detached from a person's experience – or are stories dismissed as 'anecdotal'? Decision-makers need to become conscious of how they dismiss or value knowledge according to its source, and the way it is presented. Professionals in local authorities sometimes doubt whether lived experience will be valued as highly as experience rooted in professional research or illustrated by statistics. In conversations with people working in local authorities, some professionals expressed their concern that lived experience stories would be dismissed by colleagues as anecdotal, that they would need to translate personal testimony into a more 'corporate' format, to make it credible by writing it a certain way with quantitative evidence. Underlying this is a genuine concern for credibility of evidence – but also an attitude that expresses the division between the people who are involved in government, and those who are not. Sometimes professionals have been taught that qualitative evidence, which includes testimony, is not reliable, indeed that it's naïve and illogical, unless it has been reviewed and expressed by another acceptable professional, who can place the correct interpretation on these stories. However the role of qualitative research is to bring out new insights that deepen our understanding – we don't judge this kind of evidence by whether or not it fits with our own experience but to understand something new to our experience. There is a trap here when professionals demote lived experience testimony as being

unreliable or partial; whilst community activists who successfully manage to break into professional discussions are seen as inauthentic to their communities – “the usual suspects” who are no longer authentic voices of their community.⁵ If we consider lived experience as either partial and biased, or as inauthentic and polished, we allow no space for lived experience to ever be recognised as true.

The divide between governed people and those in government can be deepened by stigma, but also by the history of people's engagement with government. People can feel that they, as individuals or as a group, have been left behind, and this real perception of power imbalance makes it important that local authorities work with trusted community connectors. This may be people from a local authority service or from a grassroots local group; what is important, said many community activists and locally-based organisations, is in building up relationships rather than extracting participants for some new initiative. Where possible, processes should be rooted in existing local organisations or locality groups. Local authorities should consider resourcing participation through funding participatory processes that are evolved and staffed by local community connectors who are trusted, rather than asking these groups to supply their views through consultations. This may mean ceding total control of processes, in favour of cultivating and resourcing long-term relationships which nurture community activists in their own communities.

⁵ This follows Michael Marker's article 'Indigenous voice, community, and epistemic violence: The ethnographer's 'interests' and what 'interests' the ethnographer', in Jackson, A, and Mazzei, L (2009) *Qualitative Inquiry Challenging conventional, interpretive, and critical conceptions in qualitative research*, Routledge

Implementing participation in local authorities

During this research, people working in local authorities as well as community activists identified that it is necessary not only to listen to the voices of people with lived experience of low income; it is also necessary that professionals implement what they learn from these experts into their policy-making. There were a number of reflections from professionals carrying out this role about the best ways to do this.

Since much policy development and service reviews are carried out without a fully co-designed process including people with lived experience at every decision point, professionals have found that they needed to mediate the voices of lived experience to their colleagues. One professional described the brokering process needed to communicate the recommendations of a poverty truth commission to services in their local authority. The professional would advocate on behalf of citizens, recognising that they couldn't always secure the changes requested by the Commission, but attempting to persuade and at least ensuring a good understanding between services and citizens who didn't meet. Other professionals saw their role as an expert witness, representing the external communities who had shared their stories. They would present testimony and challenge their colleagues to consider the weight of this testimony and come up with their own solutions to fix their policy, so that the problems raised by the stories didn't happen again.

Some professionals found the nature of lived experience testimony to be a challenge to their 'corporate' way of working and felt the need to fit these experiences into the mould of corporate decision papers. This 'corporate' way of working was defined

as defending the position of the local authority, rather than advocating for what they believed to be right. However other professionals described how the veracity of particular experience was a necessary counter to a corporate position statement. To them, the strength of lived experience testimony was that it was not trying to be a general statement, but was something that couldn't be argued with, as it had actually happened to a real person. Giving weight to that individual's experience was the very thing that was useful to expose policies and practices which weren't working for citizens.

Some professionals and community activists therefore argued that lived experience testimony should not be aggregated into an analysis which removed all details of one person's experience; instead they should be used as tools to identify problems, which professionals should then develop policies to solve. In this way of working, professionals in local authorities played a role more like an ally of citizens, bringing their lived experience into everyday working conversations, and ensuring that all policy meetings considered the insight that lived experience could bring them. One pitfall of this approach was that people with lived experience were not able to see how far their influence reached, unless professionals took care to feed back to them.

Another challenge highlighted by a local authority professional was that changes proposed by colleagues may not have prevented the problems that people with lived experience were able to identify. This professional recounted how having people with lived experience in a working group together with professionals, allowed those with lived experience to discount proposed solutions that would not have made any difference to the situations they had been in. This shows the gains made by involving people with lived experience in the process of solving problems, rather than by merely asking them to identify problems.

WHAT PRACTICAL EXAMPLES ARE THERE OF PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL POLICY MAKING WHICH ARE RELEVANT TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL CHILD POVERTY ACTION REPORTS?

Relational learning pairs between decision-makers and people with lived experience of low income.

How does this work?

Participants are matched into learning pairs, with one partner a professional from the council, and another a person from the community with lived experience of low income. The partners agree to meet up regularly over a defined period of time in the way that suits them – this could be for coffee, for a meal, for a walk – but one to one, not in a group. The aim is that partners spend time talking as peers, exploring inequalities by bringing their personal perspectives to the conversations they have. By doing this, people experiencing challenges as a result of inequalities in the area, are able to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for the area's resources, so that the decision-makers are better equipped. The relationship is set to last for an agreed period, on the basis of mutual commitment, confidentiality and respect. A facilitator provides prompts to help start conversations, keeps in touch with all learning partners and evaluate the impact of these conversations. Some community activists were keen on a refinement of

this idea, where professionals took part in fortnightly volunteering afternoons at grassroots projects such as foodbanks, to build relationship with local community workers, and to increase the professionals' understanding of the problems tackled by these grassroots community projects

What does it take to run successfully?

- Careful matching of participants.
- A structured induction.
- A facilitator to provide structure and ongoing support to pairs.
- Willingness from participants to spend time building relationship.

Who else has done this already?

In Shetland, the Voices for Equity project matched 30 community and civic participants in 15 learning relationships, to share experiences and perspectives on poverty and inequality. The project did not aim to directly change policy or suggest areas for improving services. "The Voices

for Equity project built on acknowledged theories on learning; that knowledge is constructed in interaction with others, and was grounded in the belief that participation built on new relationships will discover new knowledge, insight and understanding.” – Voices for Equity project support

What’s this model good for?

- Direct contact giving first-hand knowledge of inequalities.
- Considering the wider issues relating to inequality, rather than focusing on service silos.
- Reducing the gap between the governing and the governed.
- Participation not influenced by group dynamics.
- Engagement over the medium to long term.
- This particularly helps give policy makers experiential learning and a fuller understanding of poverty and their place in power structures.

Participatory research leading to service review

How does this work?

Working with the support of skilled facilitators and researchers, ordinary people with lived experience work as peer researchers. They set up a fixed-term project to gather evidence from others in their situation about the conditions they experience, and their interactions with service providers. Decision-makers then engage with the group about their findings, and commit to a working group with the peer researchers and their supporters, to collectively revise policy and service in response.

What does it take to run successfully?

- Staff or partners with skills in supporting ordinary people into peer research.
- Commitment from participants carry out research with others.
- Commitment and budget for a working group with high enough authority to revise services.
- A long-term engagement.
- The involvement of a national organisation can help keep the project’s momentum and policy objectives over the longer term.

Who else has done this already?

Fife Domestic and Sexual Abuse Partnership, Fife Council Housing Service and Scottish Women’s Aid worked together on a local participatory action research project aimed at improving social landlords response to domestic abuse. Scottish Women’s Aid facilitated the research, carried out by local women with experience of gender-based violence, and who had used Fife Council’s housing service. The research found challenges for the service, as officers had showed negative attitudes and poor treatment towards women. Further, women found there were very limited housing options other than homelessness as a response to their situation. With support from Scottish Women’s Aid, the Council began a working group with the researchers, to identify where policy should be changed so that women were treated fairly and with dignity. This has led to a thorough change of housing policy and practice and the collaborative working group continues to affect policy today. It also led at a national level to new legislation and a key recommendation for the Scottish Government to prevent women’s homelessness. The Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 was the direct result of the researchers’ work.

What's this model good for?

- Focusing on particular services for improvement.
- Using lived experience to affect service-level change where issues are apparent.
- Genuine transformation of services over the longer term.
- Building partnerships with local organisations.
- This approach builds strongly on knowledge and action. People taking part may well understand poverty more fully, but where the scope of the research project is set narrowly – for example, on revising a service without changing the policy that the service is set up to deliver – there may be limits on how far decision-maker's attitudes towards power relations are shifted.

Mini public

How does this work?

This is a deliberative, short term process involving a representative group of local people with a range of perspectives and likely experience of poverty weighing up evidence, leading to recommendations for further work. Mini publics are broken up into two or more interactive, discursive sessions, which are designed to give participants enough time to talk about and understand the issue (dialogue) and then come up with suggestions on how to respond to the issue (deliberation). Mini publics can be facilitated from neighbourhood or school community level to regional or national level. Their scope should be more clearly defined than a poverty commission, looking at for example, food poverty during the school day, or place-based use of community facilities, rather than wider experiences of poverty. Mini publics rely on random selection of participants

within certain demographics, who commit time over several sessions to discuss a particular issue. Participants will be recruited ensuring there is representation from those with lived experience of the topic addressed, but with a balanced sample of characteristics from across the identified geographic or community of interest. Facilitators, trained in the dialogue and deliberation process, design a process which allows for input from invited guests with expertise, but also where participants can contribute their perspective to enrich understanding and create a fuller picture of the topic. The process culminates in deliberation amongst participants, leading to recommendations for the local authority to take forward.

Who else has done this already?

Aberdeenshire Council ran a Child Poverty mini public, looking at the Free School Meals System, making recommendations about changes to policy to help address food poverty for children. The Community Learning and Development team knew through a pilot holiday food project that there were children in primary and secondary schools going without regular meals. Following this, they recruited and ran a mini public to engage with parents and children with experience of low income, to understand their experience of accessing free school meals.

The mini public was held across four sessions, two for parents and two for children. Participants were recruited through letters to all parents who were eligible for free school meals, followed by phone calls which gathered parent's views about access to and take-up of free school meals. From these phone calls, workers invited parents who were interested to take part in the mini public. Workers actively recruited a group of participants balanced across demographic criteria which included both married/single people, those employed and unemployed,

male and female participants and those for whom English is an additional language. Many participants had not taken part in community engagement activities before nor were they particularly engaged with the school. Workers designed sessions to take into account the issues raised in the phone recruitment calls. Facilitators arranged guest speakers to bring knowledge relevant to the discussion, and participants questioned them. Participants then formed their opinions and made recommendations which helped to improve the administration of free school meals.

Workers were also interested in wider issues outside narrow scope of recommendations, gathering understanding about things like freedom of choice in food purchase, the lack of appropriate information about other benefits. CLD have subsequently taken forward discussions with Young Scot around the issue of access to other entitlements through the Young Scot card. After running focus groups, Young Scot are piloting a change to the way young Scot cards work in the Aberdeenshire area. Many of the participants went on to be active in the Local Voices online forum and pupil participants started a group in the school, running campaigns around poverty.

What does it take to run successfully?

- Facilitation and community development skills – in Aberdeenshire, the Community Learning and Development team facilitated the sessions, designed activities, and invited appropriate speakers.
- Labour-intensive selection to ensure a group of participants who represent diversity within a defined target audience.
- Participant time and compensation: in Aberdeenshire, participants were paid £50 per session to take part, and pupil participants were given vouchers for entry and a meal at a local bowling alley.
- Guest speakers from local authority with knowledge of relevant policy and practice.
- Cooperation and data-sharing with the school. In Aberdeenshire, the school shared data of families eligible for free school meals, and took the lead on recruiting pupils to their mini public.
- Wider collaboration – it was clear that this was linked in with wider Aberdeenshire efforts to tackle poverty, with involvement from senior level staff as guest speakers, in approving the project and in linking participants on to other the Local Voices online Forum.
- Commitment from local authority to take forward recommendations into change, or as part of instigating new projects.

What's this model good for?

- A short term engagement, which is generative of other work – for example, it may highlight new issues which require new solutions.
- Involving people who may not have taken part in other engagement processes. As the recruitment process is intensive this can lead to people who wouldn't typically self-select, who then may be motivated to take part in longer-term processes.
- A relatively low-resource option, not requiring long term commitment of participants or staff.
- Involving a group of people to consider together how to respond to a specific challenge; such as low take-up of free school meals.
- Making space for participants to speak to decision makers in a relaxed way.
- Being part of a wider programme of engagement across many neighbourhoods/schools.

Online forum

How does this model work?

An online forum gathers together people with experience of poverty and the desire to contribute their experience. They use an online space, such as private group in a social network, or in a bespoke platform. A facilitator engages with people around particular topics, posing questions and gathering views, which may be general experience or might be opinions about a service. Participants may use usernames to keep their true identity confidential. Group members may discuss issues with one another and may be facilitated to join other online groups and meet in real life.

What does it take to run successfully?

- Technical support and devices for those who may need them.
- A facilitator to develop relationships offline as well as online, and to support participant families in their practical needs, such as advocating for them with services.
- Receptiveness from the local authority to take account of the learning available from the stories that are shared.

Who else has done this already?

Aberdeenshire have developed an online forum hosted on their Community Planning Website. A facilitator with skills in community learning and development practices builds relationships with participants, meeting with them offline as well as online to help them understand the commitment of the participation as well as to support them to overcome technical barriers. The forum now has 20 adult and 40 children as members,

who come from diverse backgrounds including Travellers, lone parents, disability and English as a second language. Participants are asked to discuss issues with other people not in the forum and feed back their views. The council also host a Facebook page, “Parents Come Together In Aberdeenshire” which has around 2000 families following, and from this they organise Zoom interaction sessions with the wider parent community. On the same page they also have a closed group which parents can join called “ Together We Share”. This closed group is led by parents and joined by 60 families, where they can share and exchange information helpful to them in a safe environment. During the pandemic the local authority used the forum as a sounding board for the rapid redesign of services. Over the longer term, the worker has been able to use the stories shared in the Forum to support learning for local authority staff that poverty is not a lifestyle choice, challenging stigma.

What’s this model good for?

- People who feel stigmatised by poverty are able to take part in an anonymous forum – this may be good for communities where people are reluctant to identify themselves publicly.
- People whose childcare responsibilities or working patterns prevent them from taking part in other opportunities.
- Overcoming geographic barriers and some Covid restrictions on meeting.
- Providing an ongoing source of testimony about a range of issues, and a place for professionals to seek advice from people with lived experience.

Participative review of policy

How does this model work?

Parents with experience of poverty spend time with a worker in interviews and a focus group. The worker identifies, with other local community connectors, parents and carers who are active in their community. The worker carries out 10-12 in-depth interviews with these participants, followed by a focus group bringing interviewees together. The aim of the interviews is to

- Understand pathways to participation for parents, in particular considering the enablers and barriers.
- focus on 4 components of participation: space, audience, voice and influence to understand how decision making spaces can evolve and improve to enable parents to participate.

The aim of the focus group bringing interviewees together is to:

- Pro-actively review the Local Child Poverty Action Report and make recommendations about where the strategy should be changed.

The worker then makes a report to the partnership in charge of action planning to reduce child poverty, as well as the working group who produces the local child poverty action report.

What does it take to run successfully?

- A worker or workers with research, participation and policy making skills.
- Close collaboration with community connectors to identify participants who are active in the community.

- Time and space to carry out a series of interviews and a focus group.
- Willingness of the partnership/local authority to reflect on their practice

Who else has done this already?

Glasgow's Child Poverty Co-ordinator, in partnership with Children's Neighbourhood Scotland and Get Heard Scotland, has begun a process of gathering a group of parents together to review the child poverty governance structures and spaces as well as the child poverty action report to come up with a set of recommendations, involving parents and carers with experience of poverty.

What's this model good for?

- Reflecting on child poverty strategy at a strategic level.
- Reflecting on how the spaces in which child poverty strategy and decision making takes place are constructed and how they can be improved to ensure parent participation.
- Building engagement where there is not yet collective capacity in the community to advocate for change.
- Providing neighbourhood, place-based initiatives with a way to feed into strategic policy at a local authority or national level.
- Reviewing existing policies and identifying gaps.
- A medium-term intervention that appraises existing policy, sense-checking it with individuals.

Panel

How does this model work?

A group of people with experience of low income and willingness to advocate for change, act as an advisory panel for decision-makers. Typically an advisory panel would provide comment on new ideas and provide an opportunity to collaborate with grassroots activists, acting as a sounding board for a decision-making group. Advisory panels are without decision-making power or accountability for actions, however their members may form part of a decision-making body and may influence strategy as well as services.

What does it take to run successfully?

- Administration, including facilitation and secretarial tasks.
- A collaboration with a decision-making body that is willing to allow influence, such as through inviting panel members to join their group.
- Support for group members to understand the bureaucracy of the decision-making body (many council formalities can be difficult to understand for people who are new to them).
- Funding for the panel to pursue its own projects.
- Ongoing training and relationship building to enable the panel to work together effectively.
- Facilitation to recruit new members over time, and support new voices to be heard, whilst keeping an eye on potential opportunities for members to work for change.

Who else has done this already?

Glasgow's Poverty Leadership Panel is a partnership of third sector, NHS and council officers that steers the development of a citywide anti-poverty strategy, and has as an advisory group its Community Activist Panel, made up of people with direct experience of living in poverty. Co-chairing of the Poverty Leadership panel is shared between the Leader of Glasgow City Council and a member of its Community Activist Panel. The CAP members attend meetings, gather views from members of their community and feed them back to the PLP.

What's this model good for?

- A structured way to bring experience from activists into decision-making.
- Long-term collaboration between policy makers and people, rather than consultation on specific issues.
- Developing relationships between decisionmakers and grassroots activists, which allow new approaches to be developed.
- Connecting disparate participation activities through a central focus.

Poverty Truth Commission

How does this model work?

Poverty Truth commissions examine inequality and experiences of poverty, involving people with experience of poverty alongside commissioners with decision-making power, experience in business, or academic interests.

The emphasis in Poverty Truth Commissions is on understanding the perspectives of people with experience of poverty, and connecting their expertise to decisionmakers, as a way of clarifying and

tackling issues of poverty as they manifest in a defined local area. This is distinct to the model of Fairness Commissions, which are typically close to local government, involving a cross-sectoral group of local representatives from public, private and academic interests, who hear detailed evidence including testimony from people with lived experience, who are not themselves Commissioners. Poverty Truth Commissions start from a point of greater breadth in sharing learning, and create space for trust and relationships to build between Commissioners, developing the confidence in marginalised participants to contribute and using individual storytelling as a vehicle for critical reflection amongst the commissioners as a group.

What does it take to run successfully?

- These processes are long-term commitments of around 18 months; participants need to be willing to commit time to this process.
- Budget to carry out, or capacity to deliver, wider research which involves the views of citizens.
- Careful facilitation to build relationships and structure a process which is both reflective and aimed at policy change.
- Compensation for community commissioners for their time.
- There needs to be commitment from the highest level of local authority that they will listen to and attempt to enact recommendations.
- Similarly, there needs to be a balance of both independence of commissioners, alongside liaison with council departments, to ensure that the council is prepared to implement the recommendations.

- Both Fairness Commissions and Poverty Truth Commissions aim at producing recommendations as well as understanding, but a further stage is implementing changes. Some areas that have gone through a Poverty Truth Commission-type process have subsequently maintained links with a supported group of commissioners who meet with decisionmakers to monitor how progress is being made on their recommendations.
- There is evidence that for this model to result in significant change to policy, council staff who are not Commissioners need to play a role in brokering recommendations into policy change from specific services; this also requires sustained support from senior council officers and elected members.

Who else has done this already?

Dundee has run a series of Fairness Commissions which have evolved to use a model with equal partnership of Commissioners bringing lived experience of poverty and those with civic responsibilities.

Edinburgh Poverty Commission used an approach like a Fairness Commission, with some commissioners involved with lived experience of poverty. This Commission has completed recommendations which were broadly put into practice by the End Poverty Delivery Plan, approved by City of Edinburgh Council in December 2020. The Plan includes crosscutting actions of both a short-term nature as well as longer term commitments over the next 10 years. Edinburgh End Poverty is an independent group of citizens formed as a legacy group to “hold the baton” after the Edinburgh Poverty Commission, to work with the Council as an independent body to hold them to account.

What's this model good for?

- A step-change in the approach to policy-making with carefully evidenced justification for change, which can be used to bring about reform rather than piecemeal activities.
- As a longer-term process, this may produce recommendations for future strategic direction.
- This process can encourage deep learning amongst senior staff who participate.
- This can provide a learning environment to nurture activists, and potential legacy group to work alongside local government.

Deliberative participatory budgeting

How does this model work?

Participatory budgeting projects are becoming widespread in Scotland under Community Choice, but most of them are focused on distributing pots of money according to identified policy priorities, either around a theme or based on a neighbourhood geography. Within this framework, choice is limited to selecting a preferred project from a list, allowing little space for deliberation – that is, exchanging reasoned views, evaluating alternatives and reaching agreed decisions. However there are models of participatory budgeting which create space for participants to talk about the problems they are experiencing and evolve solutions together. In this model, participatory budgeting is a longer term process, rather than a short term competition, with participants gathering to discuss their priorities and evolve ideas, with the process taking place over a yearly funding cycle. This requires a more formal series of deliberation opportunities for people to exchange their views, dialogue about what they are looking for and evaluate potential options.

What does it take to run successfully?

- A commitment to involve people in decision-making at an early stage of evaluating need, as well as at later stages of prioritising and selecting funding options.
- Support from technical experts to give people an understanding of how to achieve the ends they are looking for from their priorities.
- Facilitation skills from staff to support deliberative conversations between groups of people.
- Skill in running participatory budgeting processes.
- Typically an online platform to aid accountability and inclusion.

Who else has done this already?

The Western Isles Council used participatory budgeting for service redesign in public transport, to address inefficiencies in existing services. The process included consultation with community groups, who were asked to prioritise areas to be addressed and tailored to community needs. The area selected was the bus service linking communities across islands, and particularly local school pupils. Members of the community were involved in the procurement process, grading the tenders and deciding the successful contractor.

What's this model good for?

- This is a transformative approach to sharing power between local government and citizens.
- This is a longer term approach to involving people in decision-making, and should be harmonised with budget cycles.
- If using evaluation and monitoring as part of the cycle, it allows citizens to feed back their experience of local initiatives into future plans.

CASE STUDY: RENFREWSHIRE

Renfrewshire Council's major engagement with the lived experience of people in poverty over the last few years has been through their Tackling Poverty Commission in 2014-15, which issued a Call for Evidence to hear directly from people affected by poverty as well as the organisations which helped them. This testimony informed the approach of Renfrewshire Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy 2015-17, as well as guiding anti-poverty spend in subsequent years. Although the council had in place other routes for listening to citizens in Renfrewshire, particularly through participatory budgeting with young people, this Commission had pioneered a strategic, co-ordinated response to poverty which resulted in a funded anti-poverty plan.

Poverty Alliance's Get Heard Scotland programme ran in Renfrewshire from 2020, and in early 2021 the local authority began conversations with Poverty Alliance about how to bring more lived experience of poverty into policy development over the long term. Renfrewshire Council officers were keen to connect lived experience to their wider decision-making process through some kind of structure that would have an ongoing relationship, rather than occasional engagement. This was happening alongside the development of a social renewal plan which would respond to the difficulties of the Covid period, and officers were keen to take this opportunity to bring in new methods of listening to people in communities affected by poverty. They were also aware of the need for such an approach to be meaningful

rather than tokenistic. They were inclined towards setting up a body of people with lived experience that could advise over time as the council developed its plans. This body would also take into account the strength of local voluntary sector groups which already served communities and reflected their voices to the Council, who could potentially support community activists to take part in this panel.

In Spring 2021, Poverty Alliance's researcher presented the options seen in this report and discussed with the Council the barriers to meaningful influence, which had been identified in conversation with community activists, frontline council workers and grassroots voluntary sector organisations working in Renfrewshire. Some key challenges were the tendency for engagement to be run according to the agenda and timescale of outside agencies such as Poverty Alliance, and the Council, rather than following the priorities of local people. Community-based organisations instead wanted local people to be well-supported through intelligible and responsive meetings, and for relationships of trust between local people and the grassroots community organisations to be honoured. This meant that engagement should take place when the local authority were willing to take action about local people's concerns. It was also very important that the Council continued to feed back to participants exactly how their input had gone on to shape the conclusions that the Council reached when developing their policy.

Council officers were interested in the possibilities of a permanent advisory group – a panel or ongoing Commission – which would:

- include the voices of lived experience;
- directly influence a number of different council services;
- and which could provide a hub for other participative approaches that might run for shorter periods of time, such as mini-publics and deliberative participatory budgeting.

In coming up with such a structure, Poverty Alliance's researcher sought advice from other councils' officers who had managed to connect lived experience testimony to strategic policy development that cut across service silos, such as had happened in Aberdeenshire and Edinburgh. Some of the key lessons from this had related to how officers were able to use their relationships with other senior colleagues in other services in their local authority, acting as allies to those with lived experience by amplifying their concerns with services that could address the issues they raised.

Other key points of these conversations were about the skills and time necessary for workers to facilitate people with lived experience in a panel. This research highlighted how such workers typically had skills in two key areas: firstly in building relationships with people with lived experience, working holistically with them to provide practical support during difficult times; secondly in discussing with them the issues that concerned them around their experience of society, and then amplifying the points they raised amongst the council. In concluding this work, the researcher and council officers discussed the implications of a detailed set of recommendations about

how Renfrewshire Council could best build a panel which included the voices of lived experience. As part of their Social Renewal Plan, Renfrewshire Council has now committed to establishing longer-term participative approaches for engaging with people on low incomes to inform Council policy decisions. They are exploring options, including online forums and a citizen panel, as part of continued Get Heard work with Poverty Alliance.

Recommendations for setting up the panel

- At least 50% membership of people with lived experience and a co-chair from this group – someone who may have activist experience who's confident to challenge the council, might be a good choice for an initial co-chair.
- Less than 50% membership
Renfrewshire council officers and key partners: HSCP, key third sector partners, and a co-chair with clout in the council and sensitivity to including people.
- Expect that this panel is integrated with other decision-making bodies – there should be council officers going from the panel to other committees and service managers to progress recommendations elsewhere. This panel should not be consultative but an influencer; it's not just taking on views of people once at the beginning – it's working through things with reference to them as an equal partner, over time.
- Pick an initial topic that Renfrewshire Council can enact in the short term and where lived experience will be essential: such as reform of a service or choosing priorities for a budget stream that the council is primed to carry out. This tells

everyone involved that this panel is not tokenistic but focused on action. It's ok to start with a smaller group of people as long as the ratios of lived experience to civic members are respected. This is about making people feel welcome and genuinely equal partners.

- Pay for a worker to recruit, train, support and advocate for the lived experience members. This is absolutely key, as it's building relationships that has contributed to the trust necessary for all meaningful participation approaches to be effective. This worker could be situated in a third sector partner rooted in a local community. These relationships, between the worker and lived experience members of the panel, need time to develop.
- Give lived experience members and civic members the chance to meet outwith meetings to develop their relationships – or facilitate small groups to get to know one another during early meetings.

Recommendations for running the panel

- Pay for time of lived experience panel members – consider hourly contributions of notional amount per week or attendance fees per meeting. As a matter of course, pay for childcare costs, transport and any interpretation/access support costs.
- Situate panel meetings in non-council space initially and if online, in a platform that suits the lived experience members even if this goes against council preferences.
- Set a frequency of meetings that are regular and ongoing but which suit lived experience members; once a month might be a good cadence.
- It's good to allow a space for lived experience members of the panel to give their input to items on the agenda. Not everyone may make every meeting and some people may be more comfortable contributing written comments to a closed online group, or talking their thoughts through with the worker beforehand – who can then voice these comments during the meeting.
- Ensure the agenda and procedures used by the panel are plain English. Challenge archaic working practices to reduce unnecessary procedures, documents and jargon. Ensure the worker can have time to affect the agenda and the way documents are phrased and discussed, and brief lived experience members ahead of meetings.
- Spend some time setting ground rules around lived experience: members are not required to share personal stories and where they are, all members commit to listening to understand, not to challenge or respond. It may be helpful to set expectations that certain agenda items are about understanding experience and don't require civic members to defend their practice but to listen to lived experience members. Other items later in the same meeting may be to formulate action and these are the space to debate or interrogate the practice of the council, but not to interrogate individuals' lives.
- Expect to have to train corporate members in listening respectfully but this can be modelled and enforced by co-chairs.

What's within this panel's area of influence?

- The panel needs to consider the pathways into council for lived experience: how will members of this group share lived experience with other council services? Perhaps through gathering understanding of people's experience, and presenting this to other areas of the council as workshops, for example on the impact of digital exclusion or accessing healthy food.
- Also, what other approaches are going to be brought in or commissioned by this group? These might include short-life working groups on particular issues, participatory research projects, more deliberative ways of doing participatory budgeting. These can all happen outside the panel but be reported on and considered, with individual members taking part in other approaches if that suits them.
- Any revision to services or development of new services from participating partners, is co-developed with input from lived experience members and feedback from wider communities.
- Think about those who are absent as well as present. Considering where the group doesn't have members who are, for example, parents of young children, or have English as a second language, or are learning disabled: how will the panel commission approaches to understand the lived experience of these groups? Perhaps arrange visits to third sector groups who work with seldom heard groups, to listen to stories from them? Mini publics arranged to target a more diverse audience on an issue?
- Lived experience members should be able to make space for their own projects and initiatives to develop rather than just responding to council agenda. In some panels, lived experience members can struggle to find their place – and the lived experience worker is key to helping bring these ideas to birth.
- Set the expectation that there will be feedback and revisit the impact of what is discussed at subsequent meetings. It is part of the panel's work to plot where lived experience has made a change in council or partner's practice. This doesn't have to be formal research; it can be anecdotal discussion of how lived experience stories have been discussed with other services, what their reactions were, what was news to them, what they are considering, or the reasons why they are unable to implement recommendations. This is really important to make the panel more of an influential group than merely a consultative body.
- It is key that council managers advocate for the approach of valuing lived experience outwith panel meetings: the panel is generative of a new approach, not a representative body. Although this panel should be a hub for bringing lived experience into the council, it should also be a catalyst for ensuring that every service and policy maker consider lived experience as part of the mainstream. Local authorities that have brought lived experience in more meaningfully, have done so by individual managers asking the question "what lived experience do we have relating to this topic?" – and doing this at their meetings as part of normal practice.

CASE STUDY: INVERCLYDE

The following case studies are drawn primarily from engagement in the first half of 2021 with key stakeholders in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde to develop participation models that could be implemented in the future. This engagement was to identify current and previous approaches to the direct involvement of people with experience of poverty, issues in relation to capacity, constraints or barriers to long term support, connections to other policy areas, etc. In the course of this work, we also engaged with a small number of third sector organisations and community activists in both local authority areas, to understand their perspective, capacity and desire to support people with experience of poverty in policy development.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 placed a legal duty on Community Planning Partners to demonstrate that they are making a significant difference to the lives of residents through the planning and delivery of local outcomes and the involvement of community bodies at all stages of community planning. In order to achieve this the Act placed responsibility on Inverclyde Alliance to develop a Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and Locality Plans for those areas of Inverclyde that experience the greatest inequalities. Inverclyde Council and its partners agreed to develop the local planning, involvement and delivery across six locality areas.

Poverty Alliance's Get Heard Scotland programme ran in Inverclyde from 2020, and in early 2021 the local authority began conversations with Poverty Alliance about how to bring more lived experience of

poverty into policy development over the long term. Inverclyde Council's officers were keen to explore the possibilities of bringing people through the locality groups into discussions and participation on poverty, deprivation and inequalities. They were also interested in the possibility of supporting people with lived experience to take part in this approach through their Community Learning and Development team.

During the lockdown of 2021, Inverclyde Council held online engagement through a digital survey, community listening events in the six locality areas and specific discussions with communities of interest specifically those affected by mental health, care experienced young people and adult learners.

These discussion groups were structured around two questions,

'What do you think needs to be done in Inverclyde and specifically in the areas with the greatest deprivation to make a difference to the people living there?', and

'What do you think is working well currently to impact on poverty, deprivation and inequalities and what could be better?'

Participants of the groups included local residents and citizens, community organisations as well as members of the Inverclyde Alliance. Scribes and facilitators were in the breakout rooms to help structure the conversation.

In Spring 2021, Poverty Alliance's researcher presented the options seen in this report and discussed with the Council the general barriers to meaningful influence, which had

been identified in conversation with local community activists and grassroots voluntary sector organisations working in Inverclyde.

Poverty Alliance's researcher found lots of engagement from locally-based third sector organisations and local residents as well as from groups such as community councils at these listening events. However some individual community activists thought the listening events had too many participants to allow meaningful discussion, given the difficulties of having dialogue on a digital platform. The Council found many positive comments from people actively engaged in the discussion. The difficulty of having meaningful discussion on a digital platform is an issue that the Council will address in the future.

There were some observations from community activists that the pandemic had generated an enormous amount of volunteering through grassroots initiatives, which didn't always go through the established third sector channels. Inverclyde Council continues to involve these new developing grassroots organisations through contact with third sector partners such as the CVS. Both council professionals concerned with community engagement, and local grassroots organisations, expressed the desire that deeper relationships be built up between council professionals and those doing grassroots community work in the ongoing pandemic. One recommendation from community activists was regular volunteering slots where council professionals would spend a few hours working alongside volunteers at local community initiatives. They believed that volunteering opportunities would build relationships, and create space for more

collaboration – but also build knowledge of the particular issues that volunteers and the community were attempting to tackle on the ground. They also felt that closer relationships might help overcome some of the slow pace of change that they felt characterised local authority action.

Some of the challenges that Inverclyde Council were keen to tackle, were around building capacity for people to have longer-term engagement around poverty, beyond listening events, and their hope was that through the establishment of Locality Communication and Engagement Group people from each locality could meet together to advance policy across Inverclyde.

Another challenge was in how best to interpret the messages gathered from such community voice, and presenting lived experience testimony. The community team will continue to focus on building relationships with citizens, community and grassroots groups in each of the localities. The team know from experience that building trust with community members would take time. They acknowledge and understand that there are expectations to build the capacity across localities, to support people so that they can influence local decisions that affect them.

A further challenge is recording and reporting the perspectives of people with lived experience of poverty that can be presented in a meaningful way across Inverclyde and can be articulated to change policy. The community team in Inverclyde recognised the importance of the insights gained from involving people with genuine experience of poverty, deprivation and inequalities and that these insights could be useful for improving practice.

The Community Listening Events were a useful tool to start re-engaging the community, residents and other key stakeholders to discuss poverty in the area, the information and recommendations from these events have been taken forward to form the basis of the £1 million Anti-Poverty Initiatives funded by Inverclyde Council. A useful next step is to build from listening, to ensure that local people with lived experience of poverty have influence on local decisions that affect them, their families and their communities.

In conclusion, here are some recommendations to help deepen participatory practice:

- Continue plans to develop local Communication and Engagement Groups with people with direct experience of poverty, supported by third sector organisations. Work towards a regular programme of meetings with this body.
- Establish mechanisms for the members of the Communications and Engagement Groups to be represented across various decision making groups.
- Continue to prioritise building relationships with a wide variety of people with different life experiences and volunteers from across the localities and communities. Discuss potential policy with people where their input is able to be acted on.
- Listening events could be adapted to be part of a series, with attendees hearing from the council about proposed changes to policy, and deliberating on the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches for their community.

Whilst attendees shouldn't be expected to attend every event in a series, facilitators could spend time telling participants the impact of earlier discussions in the series.

- Consider developing different formats for sharing lived experience. This format could be as brief insights or stories in peoples' own words, grouped around particular themes, and should be shared with colleagues as valuable lived experience testimony which doesn't need a traditional report format to be taken as evidence.
- Consider developing a programme for council professionals to spend regular time helping at local grassroots community initiatives, as part of their work time, in order to build relationships and understanding of local communities.

