Introduction

The Scottish Government is currently legislating to extend its policy of community empowerment through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill that was introduced to parliament on 11 June 2014. The Bill covers 8 topics, including: amending Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, extending the community right to buy to all of Scotland and improving procedures; providing community bodies a right to request to purchase, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to local authorities, Scottish public bodies or Scottish Ministers; and providing a mechanism for communities to have a more proactive role in having their voices heard in how services are planned and delivered.

Full details of the Bill can be found at:
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/29852.aspx

The Scottish Government has always recognised that using legislation is only one way in which communities can become more empowered. The Government also wished to examine, in greater depth, some of the concepts underpinning the notion of community empowerment, and to consider some of the problems of implementation and outcome that wider policy might throw up. It was intended that such consideration would help to inform early stages of future policy development.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) was invited to submit a proposal on how this might be done. The proposal was for a private seminar, in what is often described as a ‘safe place’, in which the participants would be both Fellows of the RSE with relevant and recognised expertise in disciplines related to the policy of community empowerment, and experienced practitioners in community empowerment, community development, economic regeneration, and other relevant areas of policy and practice. The seminar would be followed by the publication by the RSE of a Policy Advice Paper.

The seminar took place at the RSE on 17 June 2014. The discussion which took place at this roundtable meeting has informed and guided the content of this document. The discussion was stimulated by three brief papers that are appended to this Paper. These papers have not been independently published and were produced with the specific aim of stimulating discussion on the subject of community empowerment and capacity building. Because the opinions and the expertise around the room were extremely varied, this paper represents an overview and distillation of the key points which were discussed. It does not necessarily represent the opinion of every or any individual who contributed to the roundtable discussion.

Background

What do we mean by Community?

Community is a term that is used very frequently in public policy, but it is a difficult term to define and to understand, and attempts to do so raise problems and challenges. The most common understandings of community are as community of place, or as community of interest.
Community, however defined, implies a delineated group of which individuals are members, or to which they belong. This introduces the challenge of understanding how this membership, or sense of belonging, can be determined, and how it can be reconciled with individual freedoms. This challenge is particularly relevant when we understand community as community of place. The implication of this understanding is that all individuals living within a certain geographic or administrative boundary are members of, or belong to, that community. Belonging in this sense does not look like a matter of individual choice; we belong simply by virtue of our physical location, which is most typically determined by economic capacity and status rather than by any more meaningful membership criteria. The challenge this creates is one of freedom and rights; if I live in an area referred to as a community, do I still have the right of non-membership? And if so, will my rights as a citizen who is not a member of a so-called community be equal to those who do see themselves as members? There has to be a moral space beyond community, which is where the state and civil society reside. The emphasis on Community Empowerment should not be to the exclusion of the free space, beyond the community, which the state is there to ensure.

An understanding of community as community of interest avoids the problem of a membership assigned in an entirely arbitrary way; i.e. by physical location. Communities of interest can exist across geographic boundaries, with membership based purely upon a shared interest. Communities defined by shared interests are, however, far more abstract and this makes delivering change at the level of a community defined in this way far more challenging. The current public policy context typically defines community geographically and administratively, and although this may be the most straightforward way of delineating a community, this definition may be incomplete. There is a tendency, when understanding community in this way, to focus on the physical area and related aspects of regeneration and development, rather than on the actual wants, needs and interests of the individuals living in a place. It must be remembered that communities, however defined, are communities of individuals and that their individual needs and wants will be diverse, and will transcend the physical surroundings in which people live. Communities must be allowed to define themselves, and this means that they will inevitably be defined by individuals who want to be in association and who want to commune.

**Benefits and Risks of ‘Community’**

Targeting initiatives and empowerment activity at the level of the community have benefits and risks. Communities, of place and of interest, can be tyrannical and anti-democratic, with power and control belonging to a few individuals or groups. A risk therefore is that in empowering a community we are actually empowering the strongest members of that community to do as they will, without regard or respect for those with whom they do not agree, or who do not agree with them. Empowering communities which are tyrannical or autocratic risks handing the levers of power with regard to local decision making to a few individuals and removing the ability of the others to influence or appeal the outcome of these decisions. Communities set up in this way, with power belonging to a core group, can become very exclusive. When membership of the community is based upon something as arbitrary as physical location, the risk is exacerbated. In general, people find themselves in the accommodation which their socio-economic status enables them to access. These physical spaces are then treated as communities by the State and other bodies. There is a tendency by the State to reify communities of place and to assume that everybody in a place wants the same thing. In reality, people share physical locations as a result of their circumstances, and not necessarily because they wish to be part of a specific community. There is a danger in this scenario that some individuals in an area become isolated alienated or excluded and have no power themselves to redress this.
People find the accommodation that their material class position exacts from them; so, people are found in spaces defined by socio-economic terms, and then the state treats them as communities. We rarely communities of place and we assume that everybody in a place is the same, or wants the same.

On the other hand, communities can be very nurturing places, and, if everyone within a community is enabled as part of a process of community empowerment, then huge benefits can be reaped. Communities tend to be much better than public bodies at delivering personal support and care, and they typically see themselves as having a vested interest in the outcomes for the young and the elderly, in particular. It is natural for people to feel that they have an interest in the area where they and their families live, and at the level of community there will be many ideas and opinions about the things that should be happening in an area. If communities can be empowered and enabled to mobilise around local issues, they are likely to achieve solutions better tailored to the local people than the state, operating in a top-down, centre-to-locality way, ever could. These solutions may not be perfect, but for many people they will be more ideal solutions than those delivered from outside, by local or national government.

**What do we mean by Empowerment?**

Empowerment is generally considered a good in and of itself, but empowerment has meaning and value when individuals are empowered to achieve some end. This is when empowerment becomes transformative and enables individuals to achieve and change things for themselves. Most commonly it has value as a means of furthering democratic participation, or addressing an injustice or an inequality in society. As a goal of the public sector, seeking to empower communities must be understood as a necessary phase in the transformative process of handing power and control to communities, so that they can achieve the outcomes they desire for themselves. If empowerment is not understood in these terms, the purpose of empowerment, as a means to achieving additional good outcomes within communities, will be lost. What these good outcomes might be will inevitably vary from community to community. The purpose of empowerment at the community level is to enable communities to determine the outcomes they want to achieve, and to initiate the action needed to bring these outcomes about.

What counts as empowerment is a difficult question to answer. It can be argued that within public policy over the years, there has been a perceived confusion about what constitutes empowerment. Broadly there has been what can be called a narrow view of empowerment and a wide view. According to the ‘narrow’ view, empowerment is achieved when opportunities are provided for the community to be a partner with Government; this could be satisfied in several ways, for example through community consultations. This is not the same as genuine empowerment, however, because the choices and actions being consulted on are being proposed by Government, even if individuals are being given an opportunity to feed into the decision making. This level of engagement falls short of the community-based action that true empowerment seeks. The ‘narrow’ view of empowerment is also vulnerable to empowering the ‘usual suspects’, i.e. those who are already engaged and relatively empowered, rather than the community as a whole. Responses to local consultation processes from a handful of already engaged individuals in an area may be taken as representative of the community-wide view, although many members of the community may have had no part to play in delivering the responses.

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1. Appendix C: Community Empowerment and Capacity Building (Stimulus paper for RSE Roundtable discussion 17 June 2014)
The alternative is the ‘wide’ view of empowerment, according to which communities must develop strong identities of their own in order to be recognised as genuinely empowered. By this view, community identity is understood as independent of the public sector; it may or may not drive a process by which the community becomes effective at delivering services itself. According to the ‘wide’ view, empowerment depends upon a community being ‘confident, resilient, energetic and independent’\(^2\). This requires something more than that a community is consulted on the things that matter to it. Precisely what more is needed and how it is to be achieved is examined later in this paper; however, an ability to define and address challenges affecting members of the community is one outcome that an empowered community might be expected to achieve. A community which is confident, resilient, energetic and independent is more likely to achieve this, and less likely to be dependent on the public sector to determine and drive outcomes on its behalf.

A ‘wide’ view of empowerment sees communities ultimately engaging in self-management, with previously unrepresented members of the community making significant contributions to local decision making. This level of community engagement can only really occur as the outcome of a ‘bottom-up’ process of governance, as opposed to a ‘top-down’ process. A top-down process would begin with an agenda set by an external organisation, and would then seek the involvement of the community in planning and delivering activity in support of that agenda. This might include activities to inform the community about the planned activity of an organisation, or consulting with the community about their preferred outcomes of those set out by the organisation. A bottom-up process would start with the community identifying issues and concerns, and would then address these through a collaborative effort involving the community’s own activities\(^3\) and the support of the State or other bodies as necessary.

One way of achieving steps towards a bottom-up process is through a collaborative process known as ‘co-production’. According to NESTA, “Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change”\(^4\). Co-production places communities in the position of active participants, and not passive recipients, of public services and support. This approach enables the state to harness the ideas and insights of communities, and inevitably has a transformative impact on the way services are delivered as a result. Co-production is one indicator for increased empowerment.

If the power to determine desired outcomes and to implement processes to achieve them is to be handed down to communities, then this necessarily requires a ceding of power by the state\(^5\). The extent of the power shift is less pronounced if a ‘top-down’ approach is favoured, because agenda design remains with the relevant public body, and community action is only sought when the implementation phase is reached. However, this approach falls short of genuine empowerment. The ‘bottom-up’ approach, which sees the identification of local agendas and desired outcomes taking place at the grassroots level, requires that a much larger degree of power and trust be handed to communities. By this approach, it truly is the community which identifies the societal challenges it wishes to see addressed, and it is the community which designs the processes to address these and to deliver the changes it wants. \textbf{If empowerment is to be an aim of public policy, taking a bottom-up approach will be necessary and inevitable.}

\(^2\) Appendix B: Principles of Community Empowerment
\(^3\) Appendix C
\(^5\) Appendix C
The more independent, energised and confident a community is, the greater its capacity for implementing a bottom-up approach and the more likely it is to push back against top-down approaches. We can therefore expect a shifting of power away from the state and into the hands of communities to be a natural and on-going consequence of empowerment. A very likely outcome of this process will be that different communities identify different challenges that they wish to tackle, and different methods and mechanisms for doing so. ‘Diversity is key, so how an empowered community expresses that empowerment will be something that is distinctive to that community itself.’

The uniformity of service delivery which is the outcome of a state-centred approach will therefore be eroded by the co-productive model, so that priorities and outcomes will vary across different communities. This is an almost inevitable outcome of empowerment, and can lead to better tailored solutions being developed to local challenges. However, it also introduces certain challenges; for example the likelihood of different outcomes being attained by different communities and the difficulty of comparing outcomes across and between communities. These challenges, and their impact on the policy environment, are discussed in later sections of this paper.

Benefits and Risks of ‘Empowerment’

The benefits of an empowered community derive from the fact that those within a community, of place or of interest, can generally be assumed to understand more about their own needs and wants than the State can. What is more, individuals within communities may think that the way services are being delivered in the hands of the State actively disadvantages them in some way, and in so doing replaces one inequality (the one it is seeking to address) with another. Local understanding of these unintended consequences can be instrumental in addressing and removing them, so that co-production can actually remove inequalities which the State has inadvertently introduced. Empowering individuals at the community level enables them to identify and articulate the things that matter to them. An empowered community should also be able to access the information, funding and support required for implementing changes and improvements in service delivery. Locally-driven service delivery is more likely to meet local need than national service delivery, given the local understanding of what that need is and how it can best be met, and of any countervailing pressures which may interact with or interrupt a particular model of service delivery in an area.

What is more, the skills and capacities required to deliver local services effectively are often found at community level, with communities possessing a blend of skill-sets which are more diverse than those that might be found within any given branch of the public sector. As implied above, communities tend to be good at the very things the State struggles with, such as spending time with individuals and addressing issues of lifestyle, and personal and social wellbeing. In the field of healthcare, for example, the NHS is making huge progress in the tackling of clinical diseases such as cancer and heart disease, but it is struggling to tackle social wellbeing issues such as obesity, depression and alcoholism. These are illnesses that are heavily influenced by lifestyle, and which clinical interventions cannot easily address. They require social re-education, stimulation and support. Communities are much better at delivering this type of peer support than State bodies are. Empowering communities to do so would engage a huge untapped human resource.
Empowerment, when understood as necessitating a bottom-up approach to governance, invites certain **risks**. A community which is driving many of its own outcomes, rather than deriving these from activity initiated by the State, will inevitably deviate from the courses of action and the targets prescribed by the State. This is an expected consequence of an area envisaging more targeted services and more locally-determined outcomes for itself. Divergences in which outcomes are prioritised by different communities will create more occurrences whereby outcomes differ, sometimes significantly, according to the area within which an individual lives. The affect of this variation in outcome will be more apparent if community empowerment, and the activity it gives rise to, is concentrated on community of place rather than community of interest. If all communities have been equally empowered, the existence of divergent outcomes is not so obviously unjust. Equality of opportunity will not necessarily yield equality of outcome, and divergences which occur on the basis of equal degrees of empowerment are likely to reflect localised choices and priorities, rather than inequality and injustice. **However, measuring degrees of empowerment is not yet a precise science, and this paper recommends that this is an area which requires work if community empowerment is to continue to be a focus of public policy.**

There may be further risks of empowerment which might include the danger of indecision or disagreement, leading to inaction. If successful community empowerment depends upon empowering more than just the ‘usual suspects’ to actively engage in shaping outcomes, it must be expected that this will lead to disagreement and greater fracturing of opinion. The individual members of a community are unlikely to reach unanimity, or even consensus, when making decisions about their area, and it is to be expected that if they are all equally empowered, then disagreement will be inevitable. The challenge which then faces a community is how to move on from the disagreement to achieve and deliver an outcome which does not leave members of the community feeling alienated or not listened to. This challenge might be too great for some communities to overcome, leading to a situation where no action is taken because no course of action can be agreed upon. Co-production is a useful term here, because it means communities and other bodies working together towards solutions.

**Rationale for supporting Community Empowerment**

Given the risks and uncertainties that empowering communities introduces into the process of local governance, there needs to be a clear and strong rationale for pursuing a policy of community empowerment and seeking to devolve decision-making to the community level. An issue, when seeking to build this rationale, is that there is an absence of a clear evidence base at the population level. Research into the impacts of community empowerment and the outcomes of empowered communities is patchy, and has typically been focused around specific communities and specific outcomes. The available data tends to be qualitative, and is mainly in case study format. This data does give an indication of the types of positive outcomes we can expect to achieve through community empowerment, but does not provide a clear, population-level picture of what the national impact of community empowerment might be. The challenge this presents is that we do not currently have data which are statistically robust enough to inform public policy in a prescriptive way. The data that are available, from case studies and other sources, do provide an indication of the processes and activities which might take place within an empowered community, but they are only indicative of the types of outcomes that can be achieved, rather than robustly demonstrative. This evidence can certainly provide a knowledge base around what community empowerment can look like and what the impacts of it can be, but more evidence gathering needs to be done if a firm evidence base is to be built.
A statistically reliable evidence base is something that we should work towards acquiring in order to provide a robust foundation for policy development around community empowerment. In the meantime however, policy makers should take what knowledge and understanding they can from existing, anecdotal evidence and acknowledge this as providing a rationale for committing to increased empowerment activity.

On the basis of the data that we have from the studies that have been completed, and on our current understandings of communities and how they function when empowered, there are good reasons for believing that community empowerment can and does yield positive outcomes. In the absence of a strong evidence base, these anticipated outcomes will form the basis of any rationale for supporting community empowerment as a matter of policy. Further support for community empowerment will also create the opportunities, which have so far been lacking, for building an evidence base which could guide and inform future activity aimed at empowering communities and building capacity within them. 

This paper recommends that efforts to support community empowerment are accompanied by efforts to gather, to measure and to analyse data on the impacts of empowerment on communities. We examine what more needs to be done with regard to building an evidence base in the final section of this paper.

What can we expect to achieve through Community Empowerment?

This paper has identified an empowered community as one which is confident, resilient, independent and energetic, which has the capacity to identify problems and design solutions at the local level, and which is inclusive and voluntary. It has suggested that communities are empowered in this way so that they can realise additional good outcomes. So, when the conditions of empowerment are gained what do we envisage will be achieved by, and for, communities?

Short term

In the short term, empowerment can be expected to facilitate and promote better communication and articulation, at the level of the community, about what that community wants and needs in order for its members to see themselves as leading ‘good lives’. A community that is not empowered is the passive recipient of services, support and governance. Its members are unlikely to see themselves as coordinated, or even to recognise themselves as belonging, to a community or body of local interest in any meaningful sense. They may recognise problems in their local area, but they are unlikely to see themselves as capable of influencing or guiding the design and implementation of services in a way that could address these problems.

Empowerment would see a community develop a sense of cohesive identity, and would see its members identify themselves as belonging, in some relevant way, to a movement that is capable of talking about and inspiring change. A community empowered in this way can be expected to develop the organisational capacity required to implement local solutions to the problems it is facing. An example would be the establishment of a community-befriending service to address loneliness and isolation amongst the elderly population.
The ability of a community to identify problems and to implement local solutions can be expected to lead to **better targeted solutions** than those that could be delivered by a local authority. Local authorities will naturally have an incomplete understanding of the pressures affecting particular communities, and are under pressure themselves to design and deliver services which are relevant to a broad range of diverse communities. By virtue of being well targeted and drawing upon local, often untapped, resources, locally-delivered solutions and services are likely to be more **economically efficient** than those which follow a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. What is more, communities are more likely to understand what the essential and the non-essential services in their local area are and can mobilise, in the face of cuts to public service delivery, to ensure that essential requirements remain accessible and affordable for local people. This in turn **reduces the pressure on public services**.

**Medium term**

Communities which are able to produce locally-grown solutions to the societal challenges they face also have the opportunity to **attract funding** from external sources. Funding streams for third sector and voluntary enterprises are increasingly recognising the need for, and the benefits of, community-based action, and there are funds available to support the activities of community and voluntary organisations from, for example, the Big Lottery Fund and Inspiring Scotland. Once a community has identified clear outcome objectives and pathways towards achieving these, there are opportunities for that community to make funding applications to support activity which will enable progress towards these outcomes. This might include grants for activity such as the training of volunteers and the redevelopment of community buildings or outdoor spaces.

Communities which have developed locally-grown solutions are likely to be reliant on a core infrastructure of local volunteers. Volunteering is a valuable way for people to gain new skills and increased confidence, and can re-energise individuals who are out of work or retired. **Up-skilling and motivating the population** brings medium-term benefits in itself. A population which is pro-active and engaged, with skills and experience gained through volunteering, is more likely to be able to cope with administrative and practical challenges which present themselves over the life of a local project. Human resource is essential to the sustainability of community-based action.

**Long term**

At the ‘furthest-out’ layer, empowerment delivered at the community level creates populations who are more engaged with the challenges and issues facing their local area, and who are more capable of tackling these issues through community action. These types of communities make better use of the human resource they possess by giving individuals a role in shaping their immediate circumstances. Though this process they become more resilient to changes and cut backs in the way public services are delivered, and to the societal challenges which affect them at the community level. **Resilient and independent communities** are likely to require **less intensive support by the state**.
Evidence in support of the expected outcomes of Community Empowerment

Community Food and Health (Scotland): ‘Celebrating the contribution of community food initiatives towards developing local outcomes’

Community Food and Health Scotland has published a report looking at the effects of community-based healthy eating initiatives on the outcomes of the communities in which they are based. This report looks at case studies of different community groups in Scotland and the role they have had in identifying and achieving desired outcomes related to healthy eating. It also looks at the wider impact these community-based initiatives have had on the community and on the lives of the people living there.

This study found that community food initiatives “play an important role in making communities more resilient and supportive”. The report states that where community projects take responsibility for public service delivery “they do so in a way that is often more efficient and more responsive than would be the case with a traditional ‘top-down’ approach”. Better targeted and more efficient service delivery was the primary outcome of these initiatives in most cases, but secondary outcomes were also achieved. These included ‘routes into work’ being provided, leading to improved employability in the local area, and increased independence for older people as a result of local food distribution, and/or community cafés. At a wider level still, the study also found that the community initiatives contributed to two National Performance Frameworks:

☐ We have strong resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.

☐ Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs.

Scottish Community Development Centre: ‘A case study of asset-based community development in North Glasgow’

The Scottish Community Development Centre has developed a case study on the work of the Children’s Inclusion Partnership (CHIP) in north Glasgow. This project takes an asset-based approach to community development, which emphasises the positive aspects in a community and seeks to build on these, rather than focusing on the negative aspects. CHIP works with local partners and enables children and their families to “think about what is going on in their communities, to speak out about it and to achieve some positive change as a result.” Its aims are “to make people feel stronger and more optimistic through influencing the circumstances and decisions that affect them.”

The case study of this project reports that CHIP and the network of community groups it supports and motivates have made steady progress towards sustainable improvements to the local environment through the enhancement of green spaces and other initiatives. Through its various community-led initiatives, CHIP has also helped to put in place “a high level of sustained and varied activity for young people and children”. The case study also reports that this “strong network of locally rooted community groups attracts external funding”, and that the success of CHIP has meant that external agencies view the various community networks associated with CHIP as potential partners on the basis of their positive track record and previous good outcomes. Through their success, community initiatives have achieved a positive level of sustainability and resilience.

7 http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/cfhs-not-only-but-also1.pdf
‘Top-down’ vs ‘Bottom-up’

This paper has explained that a ‘wide’ view of empowerment can only be genuinely satisfied by a ‘bottom-up’ approach to local governance. In both of the case studies described above, a bottom-up approach has been favoured, with the change agenda being developed by the local communities and actions and initiatives to deliver that change being planned by them.

A bottom-up approach has the advantage of fully harnessing local knowledge and understanding, and better exploiting local skills. It also delivers greater autonomy to the community. This has been demonstrated, at least anecdotally, to lead to positive outcomes. However, the levels of self-organisation and self-management which are required for a bottom-up approach to be successful need to be understood as destinations for many communities in Scotland, not starting points. In the communities that are likely to be targeted by initiatives to increase and support empowerment, the skills and confidence to identify local challenges, to source relevant information and to process this, and to design and implement local solutions, are unlikely to be fully developed for most individuals. This means that a lot of groundwork will need to be done in these communities, to equip them with the skills and confidence they require to become self-determining in the ways described by a bottom-up approach to community action. There is also likely to be a degree of trial and error and ‘learning on the job’ when community groups take charge of designing solutions to local challenges. What is more, once communities are equipped and ready to begin determining their own outcomes through local activity, the approaches and initiatives that are implemented are likely to vary hugely from one community to the next. This greatly increases the likelihood of divergent outcomes as described above.

The top-down approach avoids the ‘messiness’ of handing complete autonomy to communities, but it misses out on the opportunity to fully exploit local skills and knowledge, and to create fully empowered, resilient and sustainable communities. A top-down approach also risks paternalism, with external agencies retaining control of the outcome agenda and steering community action in a direction that has been decided upon by the external body, rather than by the community. In the past, this approach has tended to restrict the proactivity of communities; historically, Government has taken a paternalistic approach to achieving change and the answer to local problems has simply been the provision of additional, centrally-run services. This approach does not engage community members and tends to make individuals see themselves as the passive recipients of external support, rather than as being capable of providing support in more innovative ways themselves.

This paper recommends that activity in support of community empowerment seeks bottom-up initiatives as the destination, with top-down approaches acting only as stopping points on the journey, where necessary. In pursuit of this objective, communities should be aided to acquire the local skills and confidences to self manage. This paper also recommends that the relationship between communities and partner organisations be handled with sensitivity to the need to avoid paternalism and to take the lead from communities wherever possible.
What will Community Empowerment look like in practice?

Community empowerment, as it is described in this paper, goes further than existing community empowerment initiatives typically have, by placing communities right at the centre of local governance and, potentially, service delivery. The demands of empowerment, as outlined above, go beyond a straightforward requirement to engage with communities when implementing processes initiated by public bodies, and requires that communities initiate more of these processes. It also envisages that communities once empowered, will seek a shift towards bottom-up processes, and sees this as a desirable destination.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill has gone some way towards developing legislation which will increase community empowerment, but more is needed. The Bill covers 8 topics, including:

- Placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to develop, consult on and publish a set of national outcomes for Scotland, which builds on the "Scotland Performs" framework;
- Placing community planning partnerships on a statutory footing and imposing duties on them around the planning and delivery of local outcomes;
- Providing a mechanism for communities to have a more proactive role in how services are planned and delivered;
- Amending Part 2 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, extending the community right to buy to all of Scotland and improving procedures;
- Providing community bodies a right to request to purchase, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to local authorities, Scottish public bodies or Scottish Ministers;
- Placing a statutory duty on local authorities to establish and maintain a register of all property held by them for the common good;
- Updating and simplifying legislation on allotments;
- And providing for a new power which will allow councils to create and fund their own localised business rate relief schemes to better reflect local needs and support communities.

The additional provisions for community involvement proposed in this Bill are very welcome, and they represent a genuine effort by Government to utilise the levers it has to give people more rights within their communities. This makes a positive step towards increased empowerment. However, while the provisions in the Bill would see communities having greater input, much agenda design remains with local government/other public bodies under this framework. A further shift towards a bottom-up approach will require a much greater ceding of power by local government than is currently envisaged by public policy.

Because the enhanced level of empowerment envisaged in this paper is a relatively new concept in public policy terms, our understanding of what it might look like in practice is limited. Understanding how new community projects will interact with existing public services will be crucial to anticipating what community empowerment might look like in practical terms and what the impact of empowering communities might be on public service delivery and local governance more widely. Below, we outline two scenarios for how empowered communities might interact with public bodies.

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/77926.aspx
Scenario 1 – the complementary community

On the basis that communities tend to be good at precisely the things the State is poor at, for example peer support and nurturing behaviour, there is a potential scenario whereby the activities of the community fill the gaps left by public service provision to create a complementary system. This model would see the State ceding control over areas it already struggles with and handing responsibility for these to communities. This model might be expected to yield outcomes such as:

- “Active networks of local groups, clubs, societies and informal connections that complement and support the purpose of local government;
- Communities and local voluntary organisations working with local government, as equal partners, to work out the best way to plan and deliver public services, making sure that all interests are brought together to share their understanding and to meet needs as successfully as possible;
- Positive and co-productive relationships between public services and communities;
- Communities as long-term partners in change, whereby community-based organisations such as housing associations or local development trusts work to increase local participation alongside securing assets such as premises or land to enable them to generate income to support them to deliver programmes of activity independently;
- Improved local democratic processes at ward level, ensuring that local people and community organisations are active rather than passive, independent rather than dependent, and where political power is shared rather than exercised;
- Improved democratic processes at strategic planning level, between public agency and community interests;
- A distinct community sector in which resident groups, housing associations, development trusts, community centres, social enterprises, credit unions and health initiatives are community led or community driven and, where they work in collaboration, share services or commission with each other.”

The danger with this model is that it is the State that is usually ‘in charge’ and driving the agenda. This is not the desired end point for true empowerment.

Scenario 2 – the transformative community

An alternative potential scenario is one whereby empowerment is transformative, and sees the community seeking to challenge the status quo. Insofar as empowerment is sought as a means to overcoming disadvantage or championing a cause, we would expect empowerment to be transformative and to challenge existing processes. Empowerment which is transformative may see communities setting themselves up in direct competition with the State in the provision of services where State provision is seen as inadequate or inappropriate for local need. It may also see communities coming into direct conflict with the State around what kinds of services or initiatives are required in the local area and where resources should be directed.
A transformative model will see the community challenging the power and authority of public bodies and potentially subverting, and replacing, traditional methods of service delivery. This will involve a difficult process of power shifting, and will require that public bodies place a larger degree of trust in the individuals they work with than has traditionally been the case. Although ceding power in this way is an unfamiliar process for most public bodies, and will inevitably be a difficult and unpredictable transition, it should not be automatically dismissed as a bad idea, or as something that is too difficult to achieve. As described above, a bottom-up approach to empowerment has many benefits; placing additional trust in communities and supporting them to implement their own agendas is essential to this process. This paper recommends that any process of community empowerment should anticipate and allow for the instances when communities directly challenge the status quo, and should support communities to transform services according to their own agendas wherever feasible.

The challenge with a model which sees communities wresting responsibility and control for local outcomes away from public bodies is how community groups are then made accountable. As outlined in the opening of this paper, eligibility for service provision should not be predicated on membership of any community body, and should not be controlled by community groups that may introduce local agendas of exclusivity or prejudice. This is a challenge for practitioners supporting empowerment activities. However community groups seek to manage and direct initiatives and service provision at the local level, there must be a mechanism in place by which these groups have some accountability to the public sector on one side, and to the wider population on the other.

How do we get there?

Moving beyond the status quo

Delivering greater levels of empowerment requires significant structural and attitudinal change in the existing public policy architecture. This paper now identifies the areas where changes to the status quo are required in order to deliver greater empowerment.

Extending empowerment activity

At present, where we do see examples of community-based action, this tends to be in communities that already have a strong sense of identity and that are already structured as communities. These tend to be the communities that are best able to exploit local skills and knowledge. Empowering communities that are already engaged in this way is a more straightforward task, and will probably yield results more quickly, but where community action is desperately needed is in those communities that are engaged. These are usually the places which experience chronic health inequalities and which become very dependent on the state. Community empowerment has the potential to make the most difference in these areas, but they are also, at present, the areas where community action has struggled to take hold. There is a serious need for decisive action to be taken in communities that experience long-term structural health and social inequalities.
**People as well as place**

The focus of empowerment has become very economic in the current policy context, and does not give sufficient focus to education. The proposals around community land ownership set out in the Community Empowerment Bill, for example, place a large emphasis on the ownership of assets. Community ownership does tend to lead to better maintenance and use of State property, and goes some way towards empowerment, but on its own it cannot create the conditions needed for people to take control of their lives and improve their experiences. **Community empowerment initiatives need to include an educational imperative that focuses on developing skills and confidence in the people who comprise communities, however defined.**

Large amounts of public money have been given to regeneration programmes which focus on the physical aspects of a community, as defined by place. While the place in which people live and the conditions of the build environment do have a role to play in personal happiness and wellbeing, there is only so much impact that regenerations of place can have on the way a community perceives itself. There is little that improvements of place can contribute towards a community feeling genuinely empowered in the ways described in this paper. **For regeneration projects to be successful and sustainable, they need to be accompanied by investment in people and communities, as well as in place.** Findings from the GoWell research programme¹¹, which has investigated the impact of regeneration on wellbeing, increasingly indicate the importance of “investing in community development and social regeneration alongside the development and improvement of physical infrastructure.”¹²

**Trust and co-production**

Empowering communities necessarily entails a ceding of some power by the State. This requires both the State and the organisations working in communities to develop and express a new level of trust in the ability of people to create positive outcomes for themselves. If this exercise it to be successful, there must be some acceptance of the idea that the current architecture through which the public sector delivers services and support may be robustly challenged. Sending a message that this architecture is ‘off-limits’ for reform initiated within communities does not deliver the message of trust that will be needed if empowerment is to be a success.

One possible example is the reliance of the State on short-term performance indicators as measures of success. These measures create the situation whereby any action taken at the level of the community must be judged against a national indicator. These indicators may be entirely inappropriate for measuring the success of a local initiative, and the idea that their performance will be judged may also put people off the idea of initiating community action. This is not very empowering, and there needs to be a willingness to adapt and change the existing architecture in order to allow community activity to flourish. By their nature, performance indicators tend to be standardised measures which compare and contrast performance in different areas against a national framework. This immediately speaks of a top-down model of activity, with the flourishing and success of communities being measured against externally-determined, universally-applied indicators. If we are seeking to enable communities to move in the direction of self-management and co-production, then their progress and success should be measured against locally-determined indicators. This will make it more difficult to compare communities with each other, as different communities will focus on and develop different priorities, and will measure their success in different ways. **If community empowerment is to flourish, communities should be enabled to set their own targets and measure their success by their own standards; nationalised indicators determined by the State should not be imposed upon communities.**

¹² Appendix A
The concept of co-production will be a helpful one when undergoing this transitional process. This idea means that the State cedes power and control on the one hand, but accepts responsibility on the other. It is a model which involves genuine partnership between the state and communities, in order to work jointly towards a desired outcome. The co-production model would involve the State and the community agreeing between themselves what the recipients of locally-delivered services expect to receive, and how this will be provided. The State is then designing and producing services in cooperation with the community, rather than determining them unilaterally, or on the basis of limited consultation.

Building an evidence base

In order to better understand the impacts of community empowerment in the future, it will be useful to build a stronger and more robust evidence base than the one that currently exists. There are some methodological challenges involved in developing this evidence base; primarily, there is a challenge around distilling measures of community empowerment into questions on a survey. Work needs to be done around identifying a scale for measuring levels of empowerment, and indicators for each of these levels. In developing these methodological tools, however, it is important to remember that community empowerment should not be seen as an intervention. Empowering communities cannot be undertaken in isolation, but requires entire systems to be reformed. There will probably be a lot of unanticipated consequences of this change, and some of the outcomes may take a long time to emerge. This should all be taken into consideration when seeking to build an evidence base.

In addition to gathering traditional quantitative data sets on empowerment, and given the challenges this presents, there is also a need for public bodies to become more adept at taking on board and utilising more piecemeal, anecdotal data. Asking communities what they want, what works for them, and what would improve their lives is an effective way of identifying targets for the people in those areas, and these targets will probably vary from place to place and from person to person. The public sector needs to improve in the area of market research, to find out what people want, need and value.
Concluding Recommendations

1) Understanding what works in communities, and what communities want, will be crucial to guiding future policy around empowerment. This paper recommends that efforts to support community empowerment are accompanied by efforts to gather, to measure and to analyse data on the impacts of empowerment on communities.

The public sector should:

- Work towards building a statistically-robust evidence base, at a population level, on how community empowerment works in different communities and what the outcomes of it are;
- Improve their ability to harness localised and anecdotal knowledge of how empowerment activity works, including asking people in communities what they want and what they think works, and referring to this when developing policy.

2) Empowering communities in a meaningful way means placing additional trust and power in the hands of individuals and community groups. This paper recommends that activity in support of community empowerment seeks bottom-up, co-productive initiatives as the destination, with top-down approaches acting only as stopping points on the journey, where these are needed.

- Any process of community empowerment should anticipate and allow for the instances when communities directly challenge the status quo, and should support communities to transform services according to their own agendas wherever feasible;
- The relationship between communities and partner organisations must be handled with sensitivity to the need to avoid paternalism and to take the lead from communities wherever possible;
- If community empowerment is to flourish, communities should be enabled to set their own targets and measure their success by their own standards; national indicators should not be imposed upon communities.
- Communities should be aided to acquire the local skills and confidence to self-manage.

3) For regeneration projects to be successful and sustainable, they need to be accompanied by investment in people and communities, as well as in place. This paper recommends that empowerment activity focuses on people, as well as place, and provides investment in each.

- Community empowerment initiatives need to include an educational imperative that focuses on developing skills and confidence in the people who comprise communities, however defined.

4) Communities which are already engaged in regeneration activity, and which already possess a strong sense of identity, cohesion and purpose, are likely to be the easiest places to promote empowerment. However, the places which can benefit most from empowerment will be those which do not yet possess this sense of identity and purpose. This paper recommends that empowerment activity be extended to the ‘hardest to reach’ communities.

- Decisive action around empowerment must be taken in communities that experience long-term structural health and social inequalities.
Appendices

Appendix A

Community Development in the context of Public Service Reform
Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) April 2014

This paper is for the attention of Kenneth Hogg, Director for Local Government and Communities. It is written by Fiona Garven, Director of SCDC, following a meeting held on 7 March 2014, and responds to the question of how to drive forward effective participation and community led activity at a local level.

The paper describes;

- the current context for the debate on the contribution communities can make to public services reform
- the outcomes community development can help achieve
- the current picture of community activity across Scotland
- evidence of the impact of community led activity
- the policy environment; and,
- community development, or community support, at a local level

It proposes a coherent and strategic approach to community development at Community Planning Partnership level and sets out a flexible model.

It recognises that each Community Planning Partnership is different in scale and each serves a cross section of neighbourhoods demonstrating different characteristics and experiencing diverse needs and issues. Local approaches to community development should reflect those different characteristics and needs but the principles behind the approach are common and transferable across different circumstances.

1 Context

1.1 The contribution communities can make to the creation of a sustainable and flourishing Scotland is increasingly recognised as essential, not just in economic terms but also in terms of achieving better health and social outcomes more generally. At a time of reducing public finances, supporting and working with communities can both mitigate the effects of service reduction and lead to positive outcomes such as more resilient and empowered communities, which in the future should ease pressure on demand for current models of public service provision.

1.2 Across policy areas there is an emerging commitment to preventative action improving health and wellbeing, promoting social inclusion, promoting healthy lifestyles and extending social and community capacity to address the health issues and social issues at large within Scottish society.

1.3 In Scotland we have tiers of community organisations and structures that support some level of democratic participation from which to build. We have evidence of the impact of what communities can achieve and we have emerging research data making the case for ‘social regeneration’.
1.4 Within the context of the public services reform agenda, one of the challenges is to shift the emphasis in local government from a centrally-driven service supply model, to one that works in an enabling way, supporting and working alongside community organisations, local interest groups, and the wider population to help stimulate more active participation in communities and in democratic processes.

1.5 Community development has a key role in addressing this challenge, especially in areas of Scotland experiencing entrenched health and social inequalities and where the impact of welfare changes and reductions in public spending will have most negative effect. Working directly with individuals and groups at neighbourhood level, community development can support the design, implementation and sustainability of locally led solutions, and ensure that public services are targeted appropriately and designed and delivered in a way that effectively meets local need.

1.6 Community development has a distinct and robust practice theory base and several tools and frameworks have been developed which support effective practice. (For a brief historical context for community development, please see Appendix 1). There is an established set of practice competences in Scotland and a set of UK-wide National Occupational Standards. Community development is practised internationally but in recent years its practice in Scotland has diminished. The current policy context in Scotland presents an opportunity to re-establish and reinvigorate community development work to help achieve better outcomes for all.

2 Developing communities at scale

2.1 Many communities and community organisations are successful in addressing their own local issues. They bring in income by drawing on the skills and experience of local people; they put issues and solutions onto the policy agenda; they set up food and fuel projects to make essential requirements accessible and affordable and much more besides.

2.2 Investment in support to communities to undertake such activity is offset by the economic gains that can be made at a local level and this engagement with communities can also result in services being better targeted and economically more effective. But the picture of success across Scotland is variable, depending on both local circumstances and the nature and quality of support for locally led activity.

2.3 Where there is a commitment to community development at local level, we can expect outcomes such as;

- Active networks of local groups, clubs, societies and informal connections that complement and support the purpose of local government
- Communities and local voluntary organisations working with local government, as equal partners, to work out the best way to plan and deliver public services, making sure that all interests are brought together to share their understanding and to meet needs as successfully as possible
- Positive and co-productive relationships between public services and communities

Communities as long-term partners in change, where community based organisations such as housing associations or local development trusts work to increase local participation alongside securing assets such as premises or land to enable them to generate income to support them to deliver programmes of activity independently.

Improved local democratic processes at ward level, ensuring that local people and community organisations are active rather than passive, independent rather than dependent, and where political power is shared rather than exercised.

Improved democratic processes at strategic planning level, between public agency and community interests.

A distinct community sector where resident groups, housing associations, development trusts, community centres, social enterprises, credit unions and health initiatives are community-led or community driven and, where they work in collaboration, share services or commission from each other.

3 Community activity

3.1 Across each of the local authority areas we have a range of community activity to build from, much of it achieving positive impact but patchy and variable in impact and scale. This activity ranges across informal neighbourhood based action (for example, social groups, local action projects), community led organisations owning local assets and engaging in enterprising regeneration activity (for example, Development Trusts) and more established community organisations and large third sector organisations co-producing local services (for example, community led health organisations).

3.2 We also have sets of structures put in place at local level to encourage democratic participation, user involvement and local voice. Again, those structures are variable in scale, resourcing, co-ordination and support and, consequently, their quality and effectiveness.
3.3 Broadly speaking, the best, and most impactful, examples of the activities outlined above take place where there are well connected and confident community organisations in place; good relationships and linkages between community organisations and between local agencies and community interests; and, where there is a commitment at strategic planning level to supporting community capacity building and community engagement work.

4 Evidence

4.1 Over the last few years, much work has been done at a national and local level to generate an evidence base for the impact of community led activity. Although there is no evidence available at a population level, there is a wealth of local qualitative data that demonstrates the health and social outcomes associated with increased involvement in community life, participation in locally led activity and the positive outcomes associated with locally designed solutions. Most of the evidence is in case study format and descriptions and links to examples of data sources are outlined below;

A study looking at the impact of community food initiatives on national outcomes:
http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/cfhs-not-only-but-also1.pdf

A series of articles which highlight the work of Healthy Living Centres in Scotland:

Ten case studies looking at the different ways in which Community Learning and Development contributes to early interventions:

A report providing six case studies of community-led health in action:
http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/mtsc/Making%20it%20Happen.pdf

A case study of asset-based community development in North Glasgow:

4.2 Research evidence on the need for community development interventions and what they can offer is not readily available at a population level but one important data source is the GoWell research and learning programme\(^\text{14}\) that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal in Glasgow on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. The GoWell research increasingly points to the need for holistic regeneration, and the importance of investing in community development and social regeneration alongside the development and improvement of physical infrastructure.

\(^{14}\) http://www.gowellonline.com/
5 Supportive policy environment

5.1 In Scotland we have a policy and legislative environment increasingly supportive to community development approaches and processes, and what has been described at high levels within Scottish Government as the emerging ‘Scottish model of governance’, based fundamentally on co-production with service users and communities.

5.2 The policy and legislative environment includes;

> The Statement of Ambition for Community Planning and the need to engage with communities as an essential part of community planning processes

> The 2012 Strategic Guidance for Community Learning and Development (CLD), supplemented by the first ever Scottish legislation giving explicit recognition to CLD, defining the core purposes of CLD as: “improved life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship” and “stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities”

> The draft Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill, potentially giving communities greater influence over decision making processes, greater influence over how local funds are applied and greater access to buildings and land ownership or lease for wider community benefit

5.3 The importance of assets based approaches is becoming common language across policy sectors and within the integration of health and social care, significant investment is being placed on supporting public agencies to move towards a co-production model with service users and communities. Scotland’s National Action Plan on Human Rights (SNAP) promotes a ‘human rights based approach’ which emphasises participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment.

5.4 The recent report of Health Inequalities Taskforce highlights the development of social capital and the importance of good places as key in addressing the impact of health and social inequalities. Added to this we have emerging policy across regeneration, health and social care integration, community safety and prevention, all supportive of the role of communities.

5.5 But, despite the supportive policy and legislative environment, there still remains a lack of coherence at local level on how community led activity can be effectively supported and how community capacity can be built from which to realise co-production opportunities.

6 Community development at a local level

6.1 At community planning level, public services interventions are often attached to a specific policy area such as health, housing or community safety, and designed from the perspectives of the service deliverers. These interventions may not translate easily to the experience of communities and a set of interweaving and complex factors directly related to local demographics, history and unique characteristics. All this suggests that one outcome cannot easily be addressed in isolation of another.
6.2 Across Scotland there are variations in the types and levels of support available to enhancing community organisation and effort in any given area. Before the imperative to change the way public services are delivered became a reality, local authorities were already reducing their capacity to engage with and support communities and neighbourhood community development work has been all but eradicated. Many community learning and development practitioners operate in specific roles, often in adult learning or youth work rather than in community work, or have been reduced in numbers due to budget reprioritisation. Although a wide range of officers across local government and national agencies are now expected to have an element of community development in their role, this is not explicit and they often lack experience or confidence in working in this way.

6.3 The current financial climate presents some immediate challenges in terms of supporting existing community led activity and in supporting new community activity to develop and grow. In many local areas revenue sources used to support the core of community groups or organisations allowing them to source income from elsewhere are being withdrawn. As local authorities and their partners struggle with reduced budgets, funding is targeted at areas of immediate priority and at activity associated with the fulfilment of statutory responsibilities.

6.4 At a local level we now have more formal relationships between the third sector and local government, exemplified in the creation of the Third Sector Interfaces and their designated role within Community Planning and within policy initiatives such as the Change Fund. The Third Sector Interfaces provide a level of support to voluntary and community organisations, which ranges from the provision of information and advice on funding and other issues, access to places to meet or administrative support through to training on governance or business skills.

6.5 Less supported is the activity which takes place across both formal and informal community led activity, i.e. that which takes place at a neighbourhood level and which operates outside the traditional third sector. As direct neighbourhood work has declined, there is a resultant lack of catalytic interventions in communities, which are designed to stimulate and unlock assets.

7 Moving forward

7.1 SCDC’s analysis is that the type of support currently available at a local level does not reflect the fundamental intervention that is required to support communities to organise around local issues, build organisations, build connections, increase local participation and involvement and act as equal stakeholders in the design and delivery of the local services required to meet local need.

7.2 In some areas, particularly areas experiencing the effects of long term health and social inequalities, there is evidence of low levels of effective community activity (with some notable exceptions), and in some areas there is none at all. In other areas, where there are higher levels of community activity, the links with public agencies and community planning mechanisms are often weak or patchy.

7.3 The two gaps in existing provision are therefore direct neighbourhood work and link work between public services and community interests and organisations.
7.4 If we are to harness the capacities and assets that lie within our communities we need to design community development interventions concerned with;

- helping people find common cause on issues that affect them
- helping people work together on such issues under their own control
- building the strengths and independence of community groups, organisations and networks
- building equity, inclusiveness, participation and cohesion amongst people and their groups and organisations
- empowering people and their organisations where appropriate to influence and help transform public policies and services and other factors affecting the conditions of their lives
- advising and informing public authorities on community needs, viewpoints and processes and assisting them to strengthen communities and work in genuine partnership with them\(^\text{15}\)

7.5 This activity should be planned as part of the delivery of the single outcome agreement, with the commitment of all partners to its resourcing. The planning of this activity should demonstrate a shared vision, shared purpose and a whole systems approach. It should employ new methodologies, consider skills development requirements, and it should demonstrate strong leadership within community planning processes.

7.6 The vehicle to be used for the delivery of community development interventions should be permissive but its fundamental characteristic should be that it faces both towards communities and towards community planning partners, providing the links between agencies, voluntary organisations and communities, bridging all sets of interests to help achieve broader outcomes collaboratively and strategically.

7.7 At a community level it should;

- engage in direct neighbourhood work designed to stimulate new activity, enhance existing activity and create social connectedness
- provide support for building the capacity of community organisations by enhancing their skills, organisational effectiveness, their inclusion and equalities practice, their influence over services and their participation in decision-making processes
- seek to broker connections and collaborations between community and voluntary organisations operating at a neighbourhood level
- recognise the activity stemming from the work of those organisations operating out with the traditional third sector, for example, Development Trusts, Community-led Health initiatives, community based Housing Associations, and enable those organisations to adopt an independent community development role

\(^\text{15}\) [http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/community-development/departmentforcommunitiesandlocalgovernment/community06.aspx](http://socialwelfare.bl.uk/subject-areas/services-activity/community-development/departmentforcommunitiesandlocalgovernment/community06.aspx)
7.8 At agency level it should:

> work with those employed within local government with a community facing role to enhance their understanding and skills in user involvement, community engagement and community development approaches

> provide support for building the capacity of local intermediary organisations to more effectively engage with community needs, interest and aspirations

7.9 Across all partners it should develop shared learning and networking processes that lead to improved understanding of community perspectives, community need and community development processes and outcomes.

7.10 Finally, it should be impartial and governed locally, publicly accountable and able to generate robust evidence of outcomes.

Fiona Garven, Director Scottish Community Development Centre & Community Health Exchange
Principles of Community Empowerment

Why do communities need to be empowered?

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

However, a common starting point for consideration of communities is to observe that each community is different from the next. Diversity is key, so how an empowered community expresses that empowerment may be something that is distinctive to that community itself. Some communities have jumped at the chance to own land, while others won’t take it in a gift. Some communities have low levels of bonding social capital, because they consist of people whose principal networks are extrinsic to the community but who are energetic, resilient and confident.

Disempowerment can arise for a variety of reasons. Poor economic prospects; the loss of a big local employer; the frustration of being at the mercy of decisions made without local engagement; the prevalence of derelict buildings can all be demoralising, leading to poor health and lack of resilience. For some communities, on the other hand, such events and circumstances can be a rallying call to active and defiant engagement.

However, there are areas of Scotland where human need is high and local energy and capacity are low. These are sad places. They put high demand on public services and do not contribute to the economy in the ways that they could. So trying to transform such communities into ones that are empowered is important not just for the sake of the quality of life of the members of these communities but also as a way of increasing economic growth and reducing demand on services.

Unpacking “empowerment”

- Is the “power” referred to something that communities have that needs to be released or something that is conferred on them by others? If it is the former, does empowerment represent an increase in overall well being or the potential for conflict, either within the community or between it and other bodies? If power is conferred by others, does this represent a diminution of power on behalf of the body doing the conferring?

- What is the relationship between power and capacity? In addressing need and inequality we are familiar with the idea that an asset approach is more beneficial than a deficit approach. An asset approach would contend that all groups of people have skills and abilities that have not been tapped into. Empowerment may indicate that these abilities should be given the opportunity to flourish, whatever they may be. However, for a community to take its place in the complex and regulated world that we live in, particular skills are needed. An empowered community is usually thought of as one which has these skills.
What is the relationship between power and rights? Much of the discussion of empowerment involves the language of rights. The Community Empowerment Bill refers to a community right to buy and a couple of rights to request things (rights in relation to property and participation in processes to improve outcomes of service delivery). Human rights tend to be intrinsic – rights which are recognised, rather than conferred. Are community rights different? Do they always need to be conferred on the community rather than simply acknowledged? If that is the case, can they be conferred on any community or only on some? And, if they are conferred on a community, who/what body exercises the right on the community’s behalf?

What are the tools for empowerment?

The two tools being explored by Government through the Community Empowerment Bill are co-production of services and asset ownership. Both give communities a goal around which to gather, in which the opportunity is present to articulate the community’s needs and ambitions. Each has been shown to kick start processes which lead to stronger communities. But it has also been said that the way to bring a community together is to give it something to protest about, so that can also be another tool for empowerment, though possibly not one the Government would encourage. Interestingly, in some cases of community asset ownership, there was a pre-existing community body that had been formed to fight some cause, which then morphed into the vehicle for buying the land when that possibility emerged.

What is the relationship between community empowerment and the reform of public services?

For some people, it is not a coincidence that a concern with community empowerment has arisen at the same time as the crisis in public service delivery. The Christie Commission recommended that public services should be tailored to the needs of people and communities, rather than being delivered in a top-down, one-size-fits-all manner. It also recommended that the people deciding what the community’s needs were should be the community itself, not people from outside. For that to work, you need communities that have the confidence and the processes to identify and express these needs. Once expressed, the needs may be capable of being delivered locally on an informal basis or by involving local voluntary or community organisations, rather than being delivered by the public authority. The Commission considered that this would be a more efficient way of addressing public services. Delivering inappropriate services to people who are not in a position to demand better is a waste of resources.

So, the new approach to public services depends on empowered communities and there is more than a hint in some Government discussion documents that the purpose of empowerment is not for its intrinsic benefits but because of the money it could save off the public services bill through local engagement in the design of appropriate services and in their delivery by alternative providers. At the same time, the process of being on the receiving end of inappropriate services must be disempowering, so the Christie approach to services has the capacity to liberate communities.
**What is the relationship between community empowerment and ownership of assets?**

Community land ownership has turned round the fortunes of fragile communities, particularly in the Western Isles, and the expectation is that owning assets (buildings, land or other facilities such as piers) could do the same for others. Recent studies have shown good success for community land ownership in economic and social terms. But it’s not all plain sailing. The demands of ownership are considerable so the capacity of the community to sustain the process needs to be assisted in some cases. If the disempowerment had taken the form of stifling of conflict, then that can emerge once the buy-out process happens. And the process itself will not necessarily carry the whole community with it. But that’s what communities are like. Empowering a community is opening a can of worms!

**How can the capacity of communities be built?**

In many cases, once a community comes together for one purpose, it sees the possibility of doing more for itself and will develop new ambitions. To satisfy these ambitions, it may need help. Government can provide help in different ways.

The discussion paper on *The Enabling State* makes the point that “communities and families have an inherent tendency to be good at precisely the things which Government and public services have demonstrated to be their inherent weakness”. If empowered communities are to have a role to play in processes which are currently the domain of Government, there needs to be radical rethinking of how these processes will play to the strengths of communities rather than Government bodies. There is no point in expecting communities to slot into spaces that haven’t been designed for them and then complaining that they can’t manage. This will throw up important questions of democratic mandates and of the tension between local and universal provision. It should also address the question not just of the accountability of the community but also accountability to the community.

Government can also provide direct assistance to communities which, if it is done sensitively, can empower them, but if not, may make them more dependent. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a lot of experience of providing development officers to communities and has a good reputation for knowing when to withdraw them, as well as when to insert them into the process. The report of the Land Reform Review Group proposes a Community Land Agency whose role will be to facilitate negotiated transfer of land and assets as well as to provide support as needed. Similar agencies could be proposed for other purposes.

*Alison Elliot May 2014*
Appendix C

Community Empowerment and Capacity Building
Stimulus paper for RSE Roundtable discussion
17 June 2014

Introduction

1. The term ‘community empowerment’ has been defined and understood in many ways. Although definitions vary, there are a number of central concepts, including:
   - a shift, and sharing, of power
   - enhanced choice and freedom of action
   - the building of capacities to gain access, partners, networks and/or voice

Through these processes, communities have increased control over decisions and factors that shape their lives and are able to contribute to desired actions and outcomes.

2. It follows that public services and others in positions of authority need to cede power, invest in processes of community (and individual) capacity-building, and be open to new approaches. A key role is to catalyse, facilitate and support the community in acquiring power and transforming its choices into desired actions and outcomes.

3. Community empowerment strategies can either start with an organisation’s agenda and seek residents’ involvement in planning and delivering a response to that agenda (“top-down”), or be based on a community development approach which starts with people’s concerns (“bottom-up”) then works to enable these to be addressed through a combination of the community’s own activities and influence on public agencies.

4. Whatever approach is taken, communication is critical. Increased knowledge and awareness within the community fosters active and critical engagement, and enables greater understanding of the interplay of factors affecting people’s lives and of the routes into influencing these factors.

5. Community empowerment is more than the involvement, consultation or engagement of communities. Each of these latter processes can be achieved without significant change to the status quo. In contrast, community empowerment implies mobilisation of community assets, positioning of responsibility with communities, and supporting community action that explicitly aims at social change.

Science, evidence, values and policy

6. A range of scientific and social scientific disciplines have, in different ways, provided evidence that the abilities to make sense of (comprehend) an environment, exert control over it (manage), and predict consequences of actions are associated with better outcomes of various types. This body of knowledge has contributed to our understanding of effective parenting behaviours; stressors and stress responses; processes of learning and development; and survival in adversity – among others.
7. Research into resilience, at individual and community levels, has highlighted the importance of community networks, trust, access to information, and adaptability. Social capital has been found to have protective effects, and also positive benefits – including for the next generation. Different types of social capital are helpful for different purposes. Bonding capital supports people and helps them ‘bounce back’ in adversity; bridging capital helps people ‘get on’, enables access to information and opportunity, and generates an awareness and acceptance of diversity; linking capital enables influence over decisions and services and facilitates co-production of solutions.

8. Systematic reviews have not yielded strong or consistent evidence of associations between the body of concepts that can be grouped together as ‘psychosocial’ factors (that is, the way in which people interact with their social environments – including social support, participation, social capital, cohesion, exposure to discrimination etc) and better health outcomes. For example, a systematic meta-review of Psychosocial risk factors in home and community settings and their associations with population health and health inequalities (Egan M, Tannahill C, Petticrew M and Thomas S; BMC Public Health, 2008), “identified evidence that appears to support hypothesised associations between specific psychosocial factors and health and evidence that does not demonstrate such associations”. Within the former category are the following:

- the quality of social support and size of social networks may be associated with lower risk of coronary heart disease and cancer
- social support and participation in local activities may be associated with better health amongst elderly populations
- fewer social resources at a community level may be related to an increased likely of child maltreatment at home
- children and young people from neighbourhood environments that are considered to have fewer psychosocial advantages may shoulder a disproportionately high burden of physical and psychological ill-health across a range of measures. They may also experience family dysfunction, parenting problems and may be more likely to engage in risky health behaviours.

9. Intervention evidence offers some support for approaches that involve the active engagement of communities. The UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has produced guidance on the use of community engagement for delivering health services and preventive interventions, in recognition that co-produced interventions may impact health beyond the direct effects of their health content through pathways comprising enhanced social support networks (which buffer against threats to health) and increased control over decisions and environments.

10. In addition to this body of evidence from basic science, epidemiology and intervention research, other principles and forces highlight the importance and value of community empowerment. Among these are the challenge of sustainability (benefits being more likely to be sustained when people have some ‘ownership’ of them); the ethical principles of autonomy and respect (doing ‘with’ not ‘to’); the importance of democracy; the budgetary requirement to focus on prevention and avoid duplication of effort (recognising, for example, the common factors underpinning many social problems); and commitments to social justice, equity and emancipation for disadvantaged and socially excluded groups.
11. Several commentators, however, highlight factors to be considered in appraising the place and value of community empowerment approaches. In the Editorial of the most recent edition of the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, Jim Dunn considers evaluations of the Well London initiative, concluding that “The initiators of Well London are certainly to be applauded for their efforts, but in the absence of real socio-economic change for target populations of such interventions, we may continue to be disappointed by the outcomes.” The phase 1 evaluation of Well London, reported in the same journal, found no evidence of improved health behaviours, wellbeing or social outcomes. Low participation rates and population churn were identified as having likely compromised any impact of the intervention. And community empowerment is not a substitute for action on poverty, income inequality, and deprivation.

12. Another important message is the need to see community empowerment not as an ‘intervention’ as such, but as an embedded part of a system: we need to move from a linear analysis to a system-level approach, focussing on the contribution of communities and the interactions that take place within the system of influence. The thinness of the evidence base is therefore a methodological challenge for the academic community too.

13. Community empowerment is now widely recognised and supported within policy in Scotland, and in communities there are many examples of initiatives designed to engage with, develop capacity within, and empower communities in a range of ways. Nevertheless, community empowerment is far from being part of ‘mainstream’ practice. It is challenging to organisational power structures and established political processes. It sits uneasily with protocol-based professional practice. Cut-backs have been applied to parts of the public sector workforce that used to undertake community development and capacity-building activities. Performance management processes relate to organisational and political priorities, not community-identified priorities. Community planning partnerships, arguably, operate at too large a geographical level for effective community input and influence. Third sector organisations describe short-term funding and budget constraints. Some communities are disillusioned following previous engagement processes. Community engagement is also ‘risky’ and therefore less palatable in times of pressure (political, resourcing, organisational or personal).

14. One policy area in which community empowerment approaches are integral to both policy and practice is urban regeneration. The local ‘anchor organisation’ structure of community based housing associations can facilitate community empowerment both through their governance structures and through capacity-building activities. What follows is a snapshot of findings and insights from the GoWell programme which is studying the effects of regeneration processes in 15 communities within Glasgow.
Community empowerment within more deprived communities: insights from GoWell

The GoWell Programme: investigating the processes and impacts of regeneration in 15 communities in Glasgow (for more information go to: www.gowellonline.com).

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GoWell is a longitudinal research and learning programme, studying a range of regeneration interventions (including community engagement and empowerment) in five different ‘area types’, and looking at the impacts in terms of four sets of outcomes (residential outcomes; social & community outcomes; empowerment; and health & wellbeing). The Intervention Area Types (IATs) are: Transformational Regeneration Areas (TRAs); Local Regeneration Areas; Housing Improvement Areas; Peripheral Estates; and Wider Surrounding Areas (that is, areas around the TRAs).

At the core of GoWell is a repeat cross-sectional survey, 3 waves of which have been completed (in 2006, 2008 and 2011). In all surveys we asked whether respondents felt that on their own or with others they had the ability to influence decisions affecting their local area: in 2011 only about two in five people felt they did. Residents’ perceptions of their ability to influence decisions affecting the local area improved in all area types between 2006 and 2008; these early improvements continuing in the Regeneration Areas and Peripheral Estates but not to the same degree in the other area types, although the 2011 percentages remain higher than in 2006. In 2011, Housing Improvement Areas had the highest proportion of respondents agreeing that they could influence decisions affecting their area – but this was still only half of all respondents from these areas. Increases over time in GoWell areas compare with a static picture in feelings of local empowerment across England. (The Citizenship Survey 2010–11 in England reported that 38% of people felt able to influence decision affecting their local area, largely unchanged from 39% in 2005). Three of the GoWell IATs reported much higher levels of empowerment than the norm for England in 2011.

In 2011, in the regeneration areas, about a third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people in the area can find ways to improve things if they want to, and about 40% that providers of local services respond to the views of local people. Respondents in the (relatively stable) Housing Improvement Areas again reported the highest levels of agreement on these indicators: 57% and 55% respectively. In the areas surrounding Transformational Regeneration Areas the sense of empowerment (as measured by these indicators) declined considerably between 2008 and 2011. All other area types showed some marginally positive change.
We have found all the aspects of community empowerment that we examined to be associated with mental well-being (but not physical health), and also a positive association between perceived community influence over local decisions and respondents’ views of other aspects of community life such as feelings of belonging, neighbourliness and cohesion.

Qualitative GoWell research found a number of weaknesses in the design and delivery of community engagement in the areas studied. In light of our findings we have called for:

- communities to be given more information about how and by whom decisions are made and services provided (we found that communities can understand little about who is doing what and when, which gives them less scope for influence);
- ongoing capacity building support to enable more critical engagement with service providers and decision-makers;
- organisations that are given an ‘official voice’ on behalf of communities to be democratic and representative;
- community engagement to be sustained throughout the regeneration process (ie during and after implementation, and not solely at the planning phase)
- more active monitoring of community engagement processes, outcomes and follow-through, as our research indicates that processes of community engagement are open to manipulation by both sides (in timing, process and reporting).

Our study of community empowerment through Local Housing Organisation management committees showed a variety of types and degrees of empowerment via this mechanism. The variations in empowerment outcomes were explained in terms of three factors: the community context (eg residential stability of the community, experience of the available committee members); the organisational context (eg size, ethos and capability of the Landlord involved); and the networks and relationships possessed by the community and by the Landlord. These findings highlight the need for specific empowerment mechanisms not to be seen in isolation, but rather as part of a system of influences.
What is the relationship between community empowerment and broader societal outcomes?

15. In considering this question, some final points should be recognised.
   > Community empowerment processes will yield an agenda not neatly aligned to the national performance framework.
   > Community empowerment will challenge current ways of doing things, and therefore is likely to destabilise for a period
   > A system-wide change process will be required, with commensurate implications for the time period over which outcomes might be delivered.

16. However, at a simplistic level there are a limited number of potential policy and practice responses to the problems of inequality of outcomes in Scotland’s communities. The most common response it to intervene on each issue in a targeted way (through employability programmes, parenting programmes, brief interventions on alcohol, smoking cessation programmes and so on). Where national policy developments bring legislative or fiscal support to these programmatic actions (as, for example in smoke-free legislation), the impacts are enhanced and inequalities in outcomes may be reduced. The emphasis currently being placed on Community Planning Partnerships brings a cross-system focus on priority issues, so that for example responsibility for action on employability sits with all partners and not simply with education and employability services. The risk though is that these approaches still focus on outcomes of concern rather than on their common underpinning factors.

17. These underpinning factors have been described by Michael Marmot as “the causes behind the causes” and by Bruce Link and Jo Phelan as “the fundamental determinants”. Some of these are structural and material (living in poverty and having limited physical access to services/amenities, for example); others social and psychosocial (being informed and networked, for example). Drawing on evidence across a range of health outcomes, Link and Phelan state that unless these fundamental determinants are addressed, health inequalities will be perpetuated with every new development in treatment or prevention. It is at least plausible that this point applies also to other policy areas, beyond health.

18. Research examining mortality in Scotland (compared with England) and Glasgow (compared with comparable post-industrial cities: Liverpool and Manchester) has identified an ‘excess’ over and above that which would be expected for given levels of deprivation. This body of research emphasises the need to understand the causes of this excess (with plausible explanations including lower levels of trust and aspects of social capital) while also highlighting that these lie on top of the well-established role of poverty and inequality as drivers of poor health.
Summary

19. In this brief paper I have sought to highlight core features of community empowerment (focusing on the human dimensions rather than the physical assets of community), recognising that community empowerment is about social change and is therefore inevitably destabilising to the status quo.

20. There is a body of scientific, epidemiological and intervention evidence that indicates benefits for individuals and communities when individuals are informed, networked, have choice and greater control over decisions that affect them. This evidence is of variable quality but when placed in the context of a wider set of values and principles, the case for investing in community empowerment and capacity-building approaches is convincing.

21. Scottish policy provides a supportive context for work of this type and there are many examples of projects and services operating in empowering ways. Data from GoWell suggest a trend towards increasing feelings of empowerment within some of Scotland’s most deprived communities, but still relatively low levels overall. Several recommendations are made to strengthen practice and produce more sustained outcomes.

22. Community empowerment will not compensate for inequalities in income and resource distribution – and without attention to these material issues also, inequalities of outcome will continue. On the other hand, material explanations alone do not explain Scotland’s poor outcomes on a number of indicators and new approaches are needed.

23. Although it is impossible in advance to predict where a significant and consistent investment in community empowerment would take us as a country, if undertaken well it will benefit those involved, foster resilience, and open up new responses to entrenched problems.

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