'Governance and Power'
A SURF Debate transcript

Background

The Scottish Government and COSLA supported 'Review of Local Governance' seems to offer a 'once in a generation' opportunity to more successfully link community challenges and assets, to larger scale processes and resources. The importance of improving those connections is a longstanding priority for SURF. In the current and anticipated climate of rising demands and reducing resources, it has become more than a priority. It is essential for any serious and sustainable regeneration strategy.

Which decisions on what resources, for what purposes, are best made at what level, by who, based on what information and what mandate; are some of the essential interlocked questions that need to be addressed.

To consider these questions, and other perspectives, SURF held a special debate at the Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow, on 24th of May 2018.

Participants

The debate was initiated by:

- **Robin McAlpine**, **Director** of **Common Weal**
- **Alison Evison**, **President** of **COSLA** and local councillor for North Kincardine in Aberdeenshire

And, was chaired by **Andy Milne**, Chief Executive of SURF, and was introduced by **Jamie Ballantine**, vice-Chair of SURF and Social Regeneration Manager for Queen's Cross Housing Association.

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Introduction

Jamie Ballantine *SURF: vice-Chair*

I'd like to start by welcoming you all to this debate, which I'm sure will help prepare us all to engage with the Scottish Government's '[Local Governance Review](#)'. This review of local decision making was announced back in December on the premise that communities are best placed to identify themselves what powers and resources they need to thrive.

SURF always has believed in the notion that generally; when communities gain more power, influence and access to resources - good things can happen. Like many of you, I've experienced this during my time working in community development, in different roles in the social housing sector.

However, over the last ten years in particular, probably since the financial crash, whilst there's been some tremendous success stories with people coming together and transforming their communities, there's also been to my mind a visible increase in poverty, which is well evidenced with national and local statistics. Now I'm not going to go through these national and local statistics, because I know that you all know them, and if you don't you can find them. But my own observations, if I think about recent years, I mean in a period of months there's been times when I've seen people queuing up for foodbanks at Christmas time in one community, where a couple of weeks previously we've been holding a celebratory opening for a new play area or community space. So, whilst there are successes, there is still, I think, a worsening situation in other areas.

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> *Jamie Ballantine*

Since the financial crash, the government has placed greater emphasis on community led regeneration and I'm sure many of you feel, like me, that we're rising to that challenge. However, that challenge has been made even greater by a UK policy that has introduced, what I think, are harsh welfare reforms - which sees people easily stripped of benefits and left in a vulnerable position without money and struggling to get by.

So that's the context that we're operating in; it's a challenging and constantly changing scene, where communities and professionals are already working with the existing structures to make use of existing assets and to access opportunities that can improve the quality of life for people in regeneration areas. So we're essentially reviewing a spinning roundabout here, which we can't stop while we review it and start it again.

But this is where SURF comes in, SURF does an excellent job of keeping us all informed about the constantly evolving national policy agenda, while also making connections and increasing understanding between the different players involved in regeneration in Scotland. SURF supports this review of local governance, which can hopefully be done in a way which improves local decision

making and improves the opportunities to get involved - which in turn we hope will improve regeneration.

However, for what it is, Andy's straw poll sort of backs this up, that the Local Governance Review still has a low profile, it's not widely talked about in communities and many of us are still blissfully unaware about this review, which could have huge implications for how decisions are taken at the local level. With the help of SURF the Scottish Government has a huge opportunity to raise an awareness of this review, which is essential if the review is going to produce legislation that people actually want and can work with. I'm pleased to say that the SURF staff team have already been working on this. Since January the team have been working hard to gather the different views of colleagues and contacts across the sector. Indeed, we've already produced a paper summarising how different sectors would like to see local governance improved. We've also hosted a special conference in Govan where we brought those people and ideas together to try and agree some shared priorities.

So today's debate is intended to help us explore some of the possibilities and challenges together, everyone here understands the need to share ideas and the importance of working together. We are particularly grateful to Robin McAlpine of Common Weal and Councillor Alison Evison of COSLA for coming along today. Alison and Robin will help us start this debate with some opening remarks on how they see these challenges and possibilities. Thanks to them, and to you all for giving up your time to take part in what I hope will be an interesting and productive debate.

Finally I'd like to thank our twelve key delivery partners for supporting the work that SURF does, if you don't know who they are, they're all represented on that screen. I'll now hand over to our Chief Executive Andy Milne who will introduce our guest speakers and chair the debate and I'll exit - so thank you Andy.

Andy Milne *SURF: Chief Executive*

Thank you Jamie (applause). Ok, I'm not going to do great biographical reviews of our two speakers, because you have that information to hand. But I'm delighted that Alison, still in her relatively new role as the President of COSLA, but a very experienced local councillor, has agreed to be here today. Because in the first part of the review, you may be aware, the key area that we're looking at is the relationship between local authorities and the constituencies in which they serve, and the organisations of all varieties within those constituencies: housing associations, social enterprises, development trusts and community councils - etc. Robin, from Common Weal, you will know 'off the telly' as they say and certainly in the newspapers, has for many years been driving some fresh radical thinking in Scotland - about how Scotland might be reconfigured, how it's governance might be reshaped in a way which produces better results for more people over the piece. I don't myself see this, we'll see how it turns out, as an adversarial debate, but certainly from these two different perspectives we're going to get some introductory remarks, and it will then be my job to open to the floor and manage the debate from there.

I have a mild and harmless fetish about nice old books and I picked up this one yesterday from the excellent Magpie Charity shop in Govan, which does a great job in doing Starter Packs for new homeowners. This is the 1903 Police and Scotland Act and it covers, in governance terms, everything from what to do with diseased cows, to the breadth of the pavement and how much you can charge for hackney cabs. So with your agreement I'm going to lift this up after about 15 minutes and that will mean you've got about another 2 minutes to speak, so I'm hoping it will give me a bit of power and governance over the opening remarks.

Over to Robin first of all then to hear his thoughts on what we can be doing to improve the relationship between power and governance.

Opening Statements

Robin McAlpine *Common Weal*

I was just trying to hunt out some statistics there. I wasn't going to use them but it just occurred to me that every time I do people are still surprised when I read them out but I can't get a hold of them just now. This is in a report that I was one of the joint authors in from a few years ago called 'the Silent Crisis' it's on our website allofusfirst.org. What we did was try to benchmark Scottish local democracy against people that you might think we'd be like, basically most of Europe. There's a series of tables and these tell you straight forward things like what proportion of the population stands for election in a local authority election in Scotland, how many candidates contest a local election in Scotland, what is the average size of a local authority area, what is the total number of constituents per councillor in Scotland. Now when you write these down - Scotland is bad. The thing that's really shocking is we're not bad by factors of 50% we're bad by factors of 1000%. There are circumstances here where the average is 30 or 40 times higher than the Scottish average.

Now some of those are because of large land areas, now very famously, Scotland has a local authority the size of Belgium. Now is that a local authority? From the countries we could find we have are far the lowest number of participants in local democracy, we have by far the biggest local authorities in terms of constituents, we have by far the biggest local authorities in terms of land area by absolutely miles. All of this comes down to one consistent problem; the only developed country in the world that we could find that has a unitary system of

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>
> *Robin McAlpine*

local government is Scotland. The only one. Everybody else has, at least, a standard three tiers: national government, regional government and local government, and we don't have that in Scotland.

One of the things I think people forget is that we take our system of local government to be in some way normal. What I think we forget, is that our system of local government in Scotland was specifically designed by Michael Forsyth as revenge for the screwing up his poll tax. For those of you old enough to remember, a core part of the campaign to bring down the community charge in Scotland was run by Strathclyde and Lothian regional councils. Big powerful local authorities who worked on a regional basis and underneath them were a group of district councils. He disposed of these, such that they would neither be small enough to be local or big enough to be powerful and that's where we are. 32 local authorities which are neither regional or local and this is where we start, and I don't blame local authorities, there are all sorts of criticisms of them but they're being

asked to do a job which is really difficult, which is to be regional and local and that's hard because they're different issues.

The Economy of Place

So what does all of this mean for regeneration, for economic development? Well what it means is we're doing the wrong thing - flat out the plain wrong thing. Why? One of my big bugbears about standard economic theory at the moment is it's always macro, everything is what can a powerful person sitting in a big stone building somewhere in the largest city that we can find do, what can we do? So governing class what can we do? So we can tweak this, so we can cut that, so we can shift the other thing and inevitably they've started to see the world in terms of 'what can we do'. Human agency defines how we see the world, as my son is currently discovering, this is the nature of the universe. So what we've got is an economic system that's written by people who are used to pulling big national levers, who think that's all that we can do, or tend in that direction.

We need to go back from this, we need to take a step back to some fundamental economic theory, which is - what is the economy? Let me be very un-Marxist about it and say it's the application of labour and capital to create some sort of productive outcome. So where is the labour? Well labour has always been a place, people live somewhere, they exist somewhere, and that is where the first ingredient for the economy exists - in a place. The second thing; capital, where is capital? It's in a place - its natural resources, it's a business, it is investment kept in a bank somewhere, and all of these things are largely place based. What I think that we've forgotten is that the vast majority of our economy is actually quite boring; I mean 70% to 80% of our economy is domestic. So tomorrow the growth commission is going to report and there will be a lot of stuff about exports, great! I'm all for exporting, but that's a small proportion of the Scottish economy, and a small proportion of the workforce is directly employed in manufacture for export, it's not the majority. What they often forget is that the majority of the economy is fundamentally people buying cornflakes, getting the electricians and plumbers, child minders - these are what actually makes up most of the flow of money from person to person inside the economy and funnily enough it's where an awful lot of the wealth comes from.

So if we're talking about wealth as being profit distributed around people - if you've got an enterprise that creates a surplus and you take that out and give it to people, that's wealth being created, that's the distribution of wealth. Now we primarily still do that through labour, through jobs, and those are primarily focussed on where people live. So the resources are local, the conditions for the economy are local. Even if you're not working where you're living, wherever you are working your commuting there from where you live, using public roads, public infrastructure. You'll probably be coming home from work and working a bit more and using broadband, which is delivered to you as a semi-pseudo public utility. Place is still at the heart of how we create wealth.

Resource Distribution

I've been dwelling for a while on this concept that data just took over oil as the world's biggest single trading resource. Now I had a data scientist that I was kind of chinning about this and said what do you do with this data that makes the profit? And he boiled it down to one single thing which is - sell people shit. Now that's what they do with the data, they target the same shit at you with greater accuracy. So here's a prediction, I think you're going to find that this is going to hit a threshold quite soon, where everyone is going to say - all this data, it's useless. All we can do is sell stuff to people, I've got a whole series of emails in today about making ice lollies, cause the suns out so they are obviously intuitive to the fact that I have children - we've got all the stuff for making ice lollies! We

bought one set of moulds 5 years ago, we don't need any more - I'm not buying another set. So this concept that somehow the international financier model of economy and wealth that is absolutely dominant, and all we've got to do is reduce further and further 'international trade barriers' to create economic wealth isn't working.

Now it's not working in a couple of ways. Not talking today so much about the distribution of wealth throughout the economy - automation and all these kind of things are giving us some sharp problems, some real difficulties, if we create more and more productivity through automation the role of wages as being the primary route of redistribution of wealth around the economy becomes weaker. So that's one of the problems. But the other problem is that, by forgetting about place, we have seen radical geographic shifts in economic wellbeing - and that is at the heart of the difficulty here. So if you are making policy from the city of London for the city of London then, for example, finance and all things finance related become an absolute priority. If you're a small business owner in a small town in Scotland what you're going to find is what they mean by finance is not what you need from finance, there's a sharp disconnect from this. I live in a town, now we've just got a reprieve because we're middle class largely, well it's a mixed community but we're a bit more middle class. So we managed to wangle an extension in our closure of the Royal Bank of Scotland, so we keep our bank for probably another year until everyone's forgotten and they'll probably just close that in another round. Which is now going to mean a 15 mile drive for any banking services - this is the meaning for forgetting about place in our economy. This is going to have an impact on every business in our area, all of them are going to be impacted in this, there are none of them who do not need banking services and they cannot get it. Because again, the public policy in this has been more focussed on the usual question of how can we find some replacement jobs? No this is core public infrastructure and we need to handle it differently.

This is right across the piece; Scotland is very poor at using its natural resources. So for example - between 20 and 25% of every single square metre of our land mass is dedicated to grouse shooting, the grouse moors take up 25% of all of Scotland's natural land. If you look at other things, arable areas, now I'm not saying this is necessarily a good or a bad thing but I'm just saying it's the case, about 30% of all our arable land is dedicated to producing barley for whiskey production, largely for export, almost all of it owned by multinational corporations. So these are, on the whole, not Scottish businesses and therefore the export earnings, on the whole, do not stay in Scotland. In fact, I find this a very interesting statistic, that 75% of the whiskey industries investment is made in London, not in the production which is a much slower process and that's a result of how we've been seeing the economy.

> "By forgetting about place, we have seen radical geographic shifts in economic wellbeing - and that is at the heart of the difficulty here."
> *Robin McAlpine*

So how should we be seeing the economy? We should start from a place basis, I'm not suggesting that solid national and macro-economic foundations and policies are not important, they absolutely are. I'm definitely not saying that national intervention is not essential, it is. So for example we're soon going to publish a paper saying; if the commercial banking sector isn't interested in Scotland's towns it's actually quite easy to create a mutual community owned or local authority owned local banking system which delivers all of those services perfectly efficiently and perfectly effectively.

We've got a business model for it. It still really needs some support at the national level. The capitalisation of these banks is probably going to benefit very substantially from the Scottish National Investment Bank. So I'm not saying there's not a national role, of course there is, but we've got to stop imagining that civil servants can draw economic success on a pen from 300 miles away, they can't.

Different Problems

Now I'm going to give you some personal examples. I've just been up in Aberdeen and I was chatting to them there, saying - "it can be hard folks, for us in the central belt the oil crash was something that happened a year and a half ago, then we went on to a bunch of other things that happened but I'm guessing it's still happening to you?" Now we don't really get ongoing proper news analysis of the impact of oil on Aberdeen. We get some analysis of the impact of oil on Scotland's GDP as a whole, but not on Aberdeen, on what's actually happening in Aberdeen just now. I read quite a lot of the national press and the commentary in the national press and I don't know. I know better because I was up and asked people up there. Now that's our third biggest city! It's too obscure for me in the central belt to have a clue of what's going on in our third biggest city. Now meanwhile the town of Huntly, which is about 20 miles North of Aberdeen, it felt like about 150 miles North of it now that's only because the bypass hasn't been built, and I had to go through the middle of the city at commuting time which was like sheer hell, but that's a completely different set of issues all together. What they're trying to do doesn't replicate, doesn't reflect, what's happening in Aberdeen at all, naturally, there aren't an awful lot of oil wells in Huntly, so they've got to be doing something else. Now this is a city and its satellite town with sharply, distinctly different issues.

Where I live, Biggar in South Lanarkshire, we have a fairly thriving high street by the standard of these things with a lot of local shops. First town in one direction is Peebles, it was

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> *Robin McAlpine*

famed for having a very local high street, but if you go there now it's starting to see a quite a number of empty vacant buildings - they're just starting to get that negative effect. In the slightly other direction it's Forth, former mining town, the first time the term economic regeneration arrived in my world was when a friend of mine when I was 8 years old, I think, came from Forth and I went there and it was a bit grim, and I said to mum "what's happening?" and my mum being a politician went - "urban regeneration Robby". Now I'm 45 now and my daughters got a piano teacher that lives in Forth so I've been in Forth a fair bit, middle class told you, so we're in Forth a fair bit - it's still being regenerated. So my general conclusion is that if you're regenerating somewhere for 40 years, whatever you're doing is no working. So it's a completely different, entirely different, set of problems that you're dealing with. In the other direction you get into Lanarkshire; the Airdrie's the Coatbridge's those are the first stops for me, totally different sets of circumstances all together. Then you're moving into Ayrshire in the other direction and down into Dumfries and Galloway. Dumfries is just a different world and yet it's the first big town in the other direction from us, their problems are completely different from ours.

Local Solutions

Now I'm very lucky, I get to go a lot of places and talk to a lot of people, particularly and specifically to talk about economic development stuff, so I get to know a lot of this stuff. It would be quite difficult for me to find this out if I was just sitting in Edinburgh and researching it, not an awful lot of this stuff is written down. All I've become focussed on, very clearly on, is in every one of these places, to my eyes, I can spot instantly specific things that could be done to give them a chance of rapid and immediate economic regeneration, of real growth, quite quickly. On every occasion it's not outlandish, this is not massive insane amounts of investment - these are practical and straight forward things that can be done. Even more encouragingly whenever I go to these places, it's not like I've thought this stuff up and the locals haven't. When I'm saying why don't you takeover that and use it as a ... "we've been trying!" they say, or why don't you try to get a bit more investment in to do … "I know! We can't talk to anyone about it, we've been trying!" So what you've got most of the answers to this and absolutely none of the power and they say "yeah that's the problem!" Scotland, that's the problem. We have a country filled with places which are capable of bringing themselves right forward economically and socially. The people locally know how to do it but they have no power and no control. I can, in Biggar, send one councillor 30 miles to, right in the heart of formally industrial Lanarkshire, to sit on a council where they always say "well Biggar is different and we haven't got time to discuss that" and that's the local government.

So: abolish Scottish Enterprise, give the regional economic development capacity to the local authorities, immediately create another lair of local democracy underneath the layer that we've got which is actually town based and give them the responsibility for local economic development. Make sure national frameworks are right and remember economies take place in place. Trust the place to manage their own economy. If we don't, if we keep doing what we're doing

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> *Robin McAlpine*

just now, we will continue to see the assumption towards cities and the decline in towns, the decline in villages and then suddenly at some point in the future we're going to say - "oh my god that's where a lot of our economy was and our national figures don't look good because we didn't back the place where people live". Thanks.

(Applause)

Andy Milne: Thank you very much Robin, so Robin started off with stuff about scale there, about what seems to be quite an eccentric system of scale in terms of government that we have here. I was astonished, the only developed country that we have here that doesn't have 3 tiers of unitary local government. He talked about the focus on place; 70% of the economy being located in place, some interesting stuff about data now being bigger than oil, 25 % of land mass on grouse shooting, 20% on producing whiskey for multinationals - all interesting stuff. Then coming round to thinking about local stuff and in there that bit about, so we're getting a national investment bank but Robin's suggesting that we also need a local banking system introduced which is able to feed in the knowledge, the assets and the ideas generated from the local level. Finally, at the end a good radical

rallying call the for the abolition of Scottish Enterprise; which I take at least to be a metaphor for the reorganisation of large scale national agencies and orientating them more towards a positioning to which they can be sensitive to local context and the diversity of place. Great stuff. Ok, so Alison, quite a lot there about local authorities, Robin generously saying local authorities have got a very difficult job to do, trying to do it really well - a difficult position you are in. I'm sure you're much more aware of that than the rest of us are, so it would be interesting to hear from you about your view of the relationship between power and governance here Alison.

Alison Evison

Thank you and thank you very much for inviting me to be here. I'm going to pick up on the point that Robin finished on there about local democracy and local place and talk a bit about that here. I'm here obviously as the President of COSLA, one of the spheres of government. Robin used the word tiers, we don't like the word tiers, one of the spheres of government in Scotland. Perhaps more importantly than that today, for the context of what we're talking about, I am here as a councillor for Aberdeenshire where the oil crisis is still very much happening, and still very much part of what we're doing as we seek to diversify the local economy and have alternatives to oil. I'm also obviously a ward councillor where I represent and have come from this week. When I think what I've been doing over the last week: launching a dementia friendly area in conjunction with the local council; I've been at a meeting developing community sports hubs in the area; I've been at community planning meetings thinking about the economic future of the area, in terms of what might be ahead of us in terms of planning. So that's me, a very varied life and a very varied set of things to consider, which relate very much to what I'm talking to you about today.

I wouldn't be doing any of this if I wasn't actually fiercely passionate about delivering of better local outcomes for the community that I serve. I

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>
> *Alison Evison*

wouldn't be here today if I didn't believe that local government is uniquely able not only to listen to and act on behalf of our communities but also help those in our communities to have a strong voice. I believe though that while we've done a lot along those lines, there's certainly a lot more to do and we can certainly carry on doing it better.

A More Radically Local Approach

Increasingly there's a growing sense that Scotland needs a more local future and the more we can do together collectively to drive that forward the better and hopefully this afternoon some of the ideas that are coming out of the debate will help us work out what that word 'better' actually means in this context. You'd expect me at this stage to stress that local government is working at a grassroots level to empower communities, supporting them to identify and meet their needs, whilst also having an umbrella role to ensure efficient delivery of local services and to give our local communities a clear voice on the national stage. My own personal experience, that I've described slightly there, speaking to people day in day out in my own local area proves what most of us here know already; people aren't really apathetic about their community; they aren't really apathetic about where they live, even if at the moment they are not currently engaged; they are not apathetic about local

services they use or local issues. And I hope today that we can actually start spreading that message outside as well.

I want to talk to you today about something that I really believe would change things in Scotland, it's an opportunity to transform participation and democracy in this country, not just for today but for the long term. It's an opportunity to tackle the huge social and financial costs of inequality that, despite all our best efforts over many years, still holds back so many people. Though that maybe sounds too good to be true, it's actually an opportunity to enjoy the kind of benefits that most developed countries have had for decades, as Robin was referring too. Bizarrely it's also an opportunity that for 50 years we have turned our back on here in Scotland and across the whole of the UK. So what am I talking about here, I'm talking about the massive opportunity that we have now, to change how we do democracy in this country, by strengthening local democracy and putting local communities really in control of their priorities, their spending and their future.

> "We need a new ideology where democracy is designed from the bottom up and empowered a new system where there is a strong participation and better representation"
> *Alison Evison*

There is of course a simple idea up for grabs and that simple idea is that the people are sovereign, something I think we all know here and share. Democratic power belongs to communities, in an effective democracy communities empower institutions to work on their behalf. But the truth is that this simple principle has actually been turned on its head in Scotland. Rather than start from the bottom up, governance has tended to be designed from the top down, and that's the bit I think we need to change. Why does that matter? It matters because the evidence tells us that the way in which power has been exercised in Scotland has not been working very well. Just look at the two warning signs: inequalities have been growing and people have been turning their back on politics. A few years ago COSLA decided to explore what might be going on and organised an [independent commission](#) to engage the people about what local democracy might actually look like. It worked for nearly a year and it undertook a huge amount of evidence gathering, some of you might have taken part in that. It heard from thousands of people from Scotland the UK and the rest of Europe as well - it used social media and dozens of web casts to get people involved in its consultations and in what it was doing. It was really intensive but it was absolutely vital because it set the scene for where we've actually got to today. So it was an important contribution to the stage we're now at with the governance review.

So what did we learn from all that? Firstly Scotland has become one of the most centralised countries in Europe. For 50 years government, both national and local, has taken more and more power to the centre. In fact many people have now come to believe that it's the only thing to do. Secondly, importantly, this top down approach has not tackled the huge financial and social costs of inequality in this country. For example - life expectancy, the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor sometimes just streets apart is shockingly large in too many parts of Scotland and despite the best efforts of the entire public sector that gap is actually widening. It's worth taking a moment to reflect. It means in some parts of Scotland people live well into their 80s and beyond and a couple of miles away people are lucky to ever draw a pension. No one set out to create that situation but it's totally unacceptable in a modern democracy. This way of doing democracy has created another

problem. For decades we've seen participation in democracy decline but when you take a step back and think about it that isn't really surprising. People often feel they have little influence, they see decisions taken far away and they find it hard to see the link between what they pay in tax and what they see locally. None of that is about any single government or single political party, instead it's about a long term multi-year trend in how we do democracy. We have tried taking power to the centre time and time again and it has just not worked.

That's why we need a more radically local approach. It's not going to be easy but the good news is this is a good time to start. For the first time there is a real sense that doing things in ways that suit different communities and focus on local places is the right thing to do. So I very much welcome the prospect of the Review of Local Governance so that we can begin to make those changes. I'm particularly keen to ensure that all spheres of government and all parts of public services in Scotland embrace this opportunity. It won't work without collective change across the system in which we all play a part. This is a real opportunity to remind ourselves that politics is about people, and about how power in Scotland should actually work. Let me give you a few examples. We need to reverse the idea that strong democracy consists of a trickle of powers from national government to councils, then to communities, all tightly controlled from above. It will not be enough for a review to identify just a few powers that councils should have. We need to get back to basics and remember that communities empower governments not governments that empower people. We need a new ideology where democracy is designed from the bottom up and empowered in a new system where there is strong participation and better representation. One of the dangers of the new review is that this won't happen effectively.

> "We need to forget about the one size fits all thinking. Instead it should be for communities and their representatives to determine what works best for them and design and deliver services with that in mind"
>
> *Alison Evison*

Empowerment vs. Standardisation

We need to do far more to ensure participation and representation as mutually reinforcing, not create a sense of competition between the two. So while we must empower communities we also need to ensure that it doesn't just mean giving a voice to the articulate and well organised at the expense of those who might need our support most. We mustn't shy away from the vital role that local elected representation plays in helping to arbitrate between different competing interests and to distribute limited resources effectively. Nor should we shy away from the equally vital role which local elected representation has in giving a voice to communities on the national stage. One of our great strengths as councillors is that we are uniquely accessible to our local communities, but more progress is needed. Despite some improvement only 29% of Scotland's 1227 councillors are women. Other key parts of our communities are also under-represented. One of my own personal priorities over this term of COSLA is to explore practical changes that can turn this situation around and remove the barriers to representation and make a real positive difference.

We also need to reverse our current thinking about standardisation. That means recognising that local differences within a system of rights are part of a strong democracy not something to be eliminated. We all know, as Robin's already said, that Scotland's a diverse country, that priorities here in Glasgow are very different from those in Argyll. Yet we have 32 local authorities with the

same powers and the same responsibilities, no matter where you live, and a legislative framework which largely determines how all of these services must work. That's pretty bizarre and it's why in Europe there is a wide range of different approaches and much greater local financial autonomy. It's a constant frustration for me that we in local government have such limited flexibility in both how we use the funding we get annually from the government and how we can raise more of our own funding locally. Money for which we would be genuinely locally accountable and money that could better respond to the needs and demands of the communities we represent.

The point is that we need to forget about the one size fits all thinking. Instead it should be for communities and their representatives to determine what works best for them and design and deliver services with that in mind. Above all, we need to remember that the purpose of democracy is to improve outcomes for the people who empower it. So we need to keep our eyes on the prize and let communities make real democratic choices about local services and how they are funded. One of the issues in Scotland and the UK is that those democratic rights are not enshrined in law unlike the rest of Europe and beyond, so I also hope that we can use this review as an opportunity to hard wire strong local democracy into our system of governance and give it protection. With that in mind COSLA has welcomed, and is supporting and working with, Andy Wightman as he is developing a bill seeking to enact the European charter on local self-governance.

In summing up, I want to reiterate the point that local democratic choice and control really does matter in people's lives and that it's the fundamental principle that I'm determined to build on, as is COSLA. It's why I'm determined to make sure that councils have the resources and the powers that they need to get on with the job and to respond effectively to the priorities and circumstances facing each of our individual communities – after many decades of thinking of things from the top down. It's also why it's so encouraging that as a country we are coming round to a more local way of thinking.

Centralising services and making decisions from the top down hasn't addressed the huge inequalities which effect many people in Scotland. Instead we are beginning to learn that we need to work in ways to empower our staff and our communities - giving them the resources and flexibility they need to focus on what works. It's a big challenge but a very vital one and, like me in my role as COSLA president, I'm hoping that lots of you here will also champion local government and stronger local democracy to help give councils a strong national voice.

To conclude - we haven't got all the answers. My overall message is simple, just repositioning control nationally, however benevolent the party or parties in control, will not tackle the opportunities and challenges that we all face. Particularly in the context of that word Brexit, we need to remember that devolution does not stop at Holyrood and must be taken as far as it can go down to our communities. We should devolve as far as we can down to our local areas. I hope therefore we can use this review to re-focus on how we can collectively address the local issues that people face every day, the services that they need and how they can have a real say about what matters to them. It can be done - countries around the world have already demonstrated that. However, change won't happen on its own, it will require a different kind of democracy in which citizens participate in shaping their own lives rather than governments shaping it around them. That will mean that all spheres of government local and national make that shift to a more local way of operating. I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say, learning from you as well, and hopefully developing lots of ideas this afternoon that together we can take forward. Thank you.

(Applause)

Andy Milne: Ok thank you Alison, very good, so Alison there reminding us that people, I think as most of us here would know - people are not naturally apathetic. Somebody said to me once "it takes a lot of time and work to make people apathetic". Alison talked also, I think interestingly, about how sometimes we get locked into the idea that participation is somehow in opposition to representation and that those two things in some way should be, and can be, together. Alison talked about the importance, as I understood it, of more formally enshrining rights in terms of participation and there's some movement towards that already ongoing. But I think Alison also touched on an important point, that's been known for a very long time, which is often quoted and not very much done about it, which is about the ability of local authorities to raise their own resources at the local level rather than allowing the money to flow down. Whenever money does trickle down, it trickles down with all sorts of other stuff attached to it, which makes it not quite so effective and flexible at the local level.

OK - I'm tempted to jump in myself but I'm going to resist that at this point. The idea here, before we start, is that we've given a good 20 minutes to Robin and Alison, I'm very grateful to them both for sticking to that and I'm going to ask you to be as brief and concise as you can be, not something I'm always good at I know. It would be really helpful if you could just say who you are and if you are here on behalf of any particular organisation or just speaking for yourself, and also just let us know if you are directing a question at one of our particular speakers or just making a comment. So we'll start with Colin at the back there.

Questions and Debate

Colin Deans *Lecturer*

Thank you Andy - I'm delighted to hear that Alison is a dyed in the wool anti-centrist. I was lucky enough to be educated in Canada, where each week we had 40 minutes of civics in which we were taught our rights, duties and responsibilities as a citizen, and that took us all the way through from local to central government and installed in us a sense of duty of participation. I would love to see something like that introduced in schools here. When the Scottish Parliament was set up the convention decided on the Dehoitte system of voting as a proportional representation, and all the parties involved were virtually guaranteed that Dehoitte would result in there never being a one party government. That's gone out the door and we don't seem to have any way of changing that, I don't see those in power wanting to rescind and give up any power at all. We live in an Edinburgh centric country and a Westminster centric United Kingdom and a Brussels centric Europe where power has, talking about Edinburgh, been centralised and snatched away from the people. I'd be delighted to hear if Alison has any ideas about how you can empower community councils? Because I served on one before I became a city councillor and I want to see them having power and maybe budgetary control - but right now they are overridden even on issues like licensing. Thank you.

Andy Milne: Ok Colin three points in there. Should we really be having a duty of representation? Colin remarks on the way the imagined balance of power between different parties at national government, and indeed perhaps local government was imagined and hasn't always happened. Lastly, on the continuing problem of centralisation and the possibility of community councils having actual resources and actual formal decision making power. Robin?

Robin McAlpine: Right, there's a whole bunch of things in there that I agree with. The one thing, we looked at this question of re-empowering community councils, for creating the next layer and the problem is putting that humpty dumpty back together again struck us as being more problematic

than just starting a new system. The problem with it is there are either: completely missing community councils, community councils that aren't working or community councils that are really rather good but with no resources. Trying to work out where you need to fix them, create them or support them was more work than just saying - right here's a new system. So we were really saying - let's give up on community councils. The model that we were looking for was; don't reorganise bureaucracies, that's the expensive bit, just have two different councils instructing the same officers on different policy responsibilities. So it's not a massive reorganisation you just say, if it's this element of planning it's the local authority down here that makes a decision and instructs officials and if it's a regional planning matter it's this group, this body that does it. I think there would be an inevitable drift back of power to where places were and some of the staffing, but we thought that was the better option.

How to build in the duty of responsibility, now I kind of meant to say this but I didn't. Now I've got a fairly radical suggestion which is - I think we should institute a fundamental legal right in Scotland, which I was calling 'the power of general competence of communities'. A community

> "The thing that makes people participate is power. This is the single most important thing. You can educate people, but if they don't have power they drift away."
>
> *Robin McAlpine*

always has the fundamental right to decide how it's represented locally. So just put that in as law and from that point onwards it all becomes negotiation. The question is - where is the right amount? I'm massively comfortable with a-symmetry. So for example, in my area - 4 or 5 local villages in a little cluster next to Biggar, they might want to be a 'villages' council and handle themselves or they might want to be part of a Biggar Council. That's up to them to make the decision, leave the power and legal right to them.

Just one comment on that point about the civics. Yes of course but we can't wait to educate a whole new generation. I'm really for civics and I think we've got to get this back into schools right now. But actually the thing that makes people participate is power. This is the single most important thing. You can educate people but if they don't have power they drift away. You can take people who've never come across democratic concepts whatsoever, but give them power and they find their way to it. This idea that failure is quite likely and a problem if it's local but not likely and not a problem if it's national is endemic. We've got to accept that failure happens at every level of government and we've got to stop assuming that local people can't manage these affairs - they can.

Andy Milne: Good, Ok, thank you. Alison, anything on that?

Alison Evison: Yes. At the moment in our schools the only way that people really understand and learn about how our democratic system currently works is through studying the formal subject of modern studies. For the rest of them they can easily go through life and not understand anything about our current, imperfect, system of democracy. I think maybe going on those lines is maybe not where we want to be at the moment. We want to think about participation, empowering, making people actually become more involved in what they can do - feel that they're participating and they're getting involved in doing something. So they think "yes alright that helps decide what's happening in my local area and therefore I do have a voice". Giving people a voice rather than a formal lesson in something, which may or may not be of interest, I think is the key bit with that.

That links to maybe what I want to say about community councils as well - you need to think about doing things differently. I've been at two community councils in the last four or five days, I've been sitting there as a local councillor, hearing the views and listening to what's being said there. I suppose [with] each one we're talking about ten members of the public there, none of them elected, who are self-elected, because they're the ones who go to the community councils. Yet they have that statutory role within our planning service, and what we are doing and we are there listening to is the community through them. You know, if we actually had this sense of participation and this sense that people are empowered, we'll be moving to a system with our community councils where more people are actually involved in the life of their community. So, I think we've got something which maybe works in some areas and maybe doesn't work in others. But we need to go back to that participation and empowerment, it's the key to what we're doing, get that right through our Local Governance Review and put ideas forward about how that could develop.

Key as well though, every area, as we've both stressed today, is totally different. Some areas will have very well established local community councils, development groups, village associations, whatever the call themselves doing a very important local function. In other areas, that won't exist at all, people have maybe moved into an area, they've got no historic link with, no family there, they go somewhere else to work, they go somewhere else to shop and they just sleep in that area. You know we've got lots of different communities and we've got to - yes empower and help people participate, but we've also got to think that we've got to have different solutions for different areas, and that's where our role as local councillors comes in as well, understanding that and helping people support and move them forward. So let's just do everything differently.

Andy Milne: I've got 1, 2 and then 3 over there and then hopefully we'll get some gender balance in the questions after that. Can we have them as concise as possible and the answers as we can?

Martin Allen *Member of the public*

I find what you're saying kind of contradictory, because Robin, you're saying you need formal community opportunities? Well that's what a community council is but community councils are ignored - they've never been supported. When they do get in a position and they start scrutinising local bodies, then that's when community planning comes in and buries them, basically, because community planning is funded individuals and community councils aren't. I'd never let community councils have any financial control - 100% I would make sure they absolutely had the ability to scrutinise all the finances within their local area. Alison you said yourself there, on being the President of COSLA, and congratulations on that, I wish you well, but if COSLA is basically the organisation which supports the management of local authorities, so you're looking at democracy there at a local level, what's the COSLA stats on community councils and the promotion of community councils, and making sure that they're getting free and fair opportunity to exercise democracy locally? Because I could probably tell you the answer for that is they don't. Because they don't want them to work, because they don't want local democracy and local scrutiny, that's what the difficulty is. And one final point, you were saying how getting rid of Strathclyde was a big mistake, but then you're saying get rid of Scottish Enterprise. What's the difference? Is it a political difference? Because that's what's killing local democracy; politics and personality. It's nothing to do with policy, the policy is all there, they're just never supported, never enforced, personality and politics come in and destroy it and that's how communities fall apart - because the people that can leave do.

Andy Milne: Thank you. Any response on any of that?

Alison Evison: Firstly, I'll correct you on COSLA because I think it's important to do that; we don't manage, we don't manage councils, we represent our members - all 32 local authorities are members of COSLA. We are a membership organisation, we don't manage them, and we have no controls over what they do. And that's not right either because we've got our own internal politically democratic organisation, so we decide what we're doing, through votes of on a democratic basis as well, from all the 32 authorities. So we have no management.

Martin Allen: Do you scrutinise them to make sure they are complying with their own obligations?

Alison Evison: We do not manage, we are there as a membership organisation and I think that's an important point to make on what you're saying, because we don't have that role. But I would come back, as well, on what COSLA's priorities actually are though and what we're actually trying to do with that. You say we don't want to deal with local communities, you say we don't want to empower local democracy - we do very much, that's a key part of our work. As a local councillor I am there talking to people in my local areas, my 1226 fellow councillors are doing this as well - we're working very closely with our local communities to engage with them. As COSLA we really want to strengthen that, strengthen that local democracy, we want to encourage people to work in partnership locally and find out together what's important and work together in our communities to deliver on outcomes. I think the premise at the beginning was wrong and I think it was important to correct that one.

Robin McAlpine: What I was trying to say was, no community councils are not the answer. That's exactly what I was trying to say - community councils haven't worked. What we're seeing is you need statutory bodies with budgets and legal powers, which are fully democratically elected, like every other single country; this is normal, everywhere has this apart from here. No that's a statement of fact. All the developed countries have three tiers of government and that's definitely the case. All we're saying is have a proper local and regional tier, I'm never going to stop saying that, tier of government and have each one of them a proper functioning part. Community councils have no budget and no power and that's why they're dysfunctional because people join for other reasons.

And just to say I'm not saying that abolishing Strathclyde was a bad idea, what I'm saying, the same thing; that was a two tier system, regional and district, getting rid of that was a bad idea. We can argue for hours if Strathclyde was too big or not and Scottish Enterprise (Martin - we could argue for hours about community councils as well), well they had a different function back then. What I'm saying is we do not have the ability to make basic, we can't close a street in a town if a town wants to put a farmers market in the town, there is not a town in Scotland which has got a council which is allowed to close the street and make a farmers market. So they can't do these sorts of responsive local things - because they have no power. That's what's missing. We just need to be normal before we're brilliant.

Andy Milne: And one other point at the end there, which often comes up, is about the degree to which party politics plays in local government - any views on that?

Robin McAlpine: Across Europe it's fairly normal that the lowest tier of local government isn't a party representative, they are community politicians, that's normal. That's one of the things that we're missing. The culture, when you get down to the lowest tier of local government, quite often it's not party organised, it's local people stepping up on their own platform to present locally. And sorry I was going to say that on the point of gender, this is often the point that women first come in to politics, is at the lower level, excluded groups, and that ladder element is another thing that we're missing. The jump from being no politician to even a councillor in a regional local authority is big.

Allison Evison: I'm going to correct Robin again on that one, we're not a lower tier of government we're a different sphere of government and I'm going to keep coming back on that one, correcting him on that. To be honest I think having political parties in local government is actually more honest. I think if you know whose working with whom then you know the kind of discussions that are going on, you've got a sense of vision and what people's priorities actually are. Every person getting involved in local governance will have a particular bugbear, particular interest, if you're working through a political party that's more honest, that's more transparent. You know whose going to be working with whom and that affects how you vote and how you choose your representatives and how you work with your local representatives as well. So I actually think that's a good thing. If it wasn't there it would be invented.

Andy Milne: Ok. Thank you Alison - Gentleman there, then was there somebody else after that? Over in this area

Bobby MacAulay *Glasgow Caledonian University*

Hello, I'm from Glasgow Caledonian University, although I don't pretend to represent them. In some areas of, especially rural, Scotland there are levels of community based democracy with both funding and responsibility in the forms of community land owning trusts. I was just wondering what you thought were the pros and cons of non-statutory levels of local power and democracy such as these land owning trusts?

Andy Milne: Land owning trusts?

Robin McAlpine: My snap response to that is - these can be great initiatives, but they don't replace the need for a proper democratic structure. Part of the problem in Scotland is we disposed of a proper layer of democratic structure and then we keep inventing things to try and make up for that. So the other one that everyone talks about is the community partnerships, where all the different government agencies try and get into a room and try and cover up the fact that there's no sub-regional element. So the same people that are doing the regional element do the same thing in a local area and there we say they're being local. Now again, these are better than not having them but they're worse than a proper system. There are all sorts of things. I'm a fan of locally owned energy companies, which may be a mutual local community owned trust and which is not necessarily exactly the same scale as a local authority.

> "It's either centralisation or postcode lottery. You can't scream about one successively after the other. Either we make one decision for the whole of Scotland or we make different decisions for different bits of Scotland."
> *Robin McAlpine*

But when it comes down to it there are certain core functions such as: deciding on planning, the distribution of resources and all these kind of things. I believe that every member of the public should have a direct say. There should be a national day where you have local elections and everybody goes out and selects their local government with its proper powers to do what the local government should be doing. Once that's in place I'm over the moon about everything from mutual to municipal banks, energy companies anything. As well as, not instead of.

Andy Milne: Alison?

Alison Evison: Just two points briefly to add to that one - If it works in the local area, that's what we're talking about, going to a local area and doing what's appropriate in a local area, that's what we must allow to happen. We can't have this standardisation, which has been shown over recent years not to work. The other point is that democracy is important, within that organisation and within every organisation, we can't end up with a couple of people controlling what is happening in a local area. Anything like that should be, I believe, subject to a proper democratic voting.

Andy Milne: So we're going to be happy with postcode lotteries? Postcode lotteries are always put up on the front page of newspapers as some kind of disaster.

Alison Evison: I'd like to word that differently, it's not a postcode lottery, it should be - what local people in a local area want to spend their money on. They should be able to raise the local money. Local government should have more powers to raise its money to deliver what people in that area want. If they want super-duper cinema complex in the middle of a rural area, if the community want that, then they should be able to raise the money to do that. Local areas matter.

Robin McAlpine: Can I just scream about that - folks it's either centralisation or postcode lottery. You can't scream about one successively after the other. Either we make one decision for the whole of Scotland or we make different decisions for different bits of Scotland. Make your mind up! Well it's not you it's the media.

Andy Milne: Or we do it at different levels - national decision making?

Robin McAlpine: But as soon as you move down a level, as soon as there is more than one unit, they'll make different decisions, so the place that you live will be different from another place. Postcode lottery means centralise.

Andy Milne: Craig, you going to shout?

Craig Sanderson - Link Housing

(Craig Sanderson raised two other points which have unfortunately been lost from the transcript – one regarding social enterprise, and one regarding procurement)

This is to do with place and power. It's recognised that the current Scottish Government's support for the provision of more social housing; it's the best form, social housing subsidy is the best subsidy available to maintain properties available for rent, now the right to buys been scrapped, affordable to people on low or limited fixed incomes, that gives them the power to support other local shops and cinemas and all that stuff because they're not having to spend all their income on rent. So please support, all of you, the ongoing commitment to social housing in Scotland.

Andy Milne: Thank you, admirably brief, thank you Craig. So: the power of social enterprise, the power of procurement, and how that's used, and lastly the importance of well supported social housing programs.

Alison Evison: When you said social enterprise I wrote down procurement, that's how my mind is working straight away on that one as well. Councils have the ability through our procurement policies to get things right, to encourage social enterprise and to make sure that what they offer can be written in to the tendering process. When councils have their big meet the customer events and encourage people to come along and show what they can provide for the local area - social

enterprises should be involved in that kind of work as well, so they're there on an equal footing. I agree totally with what you've said there.

Though there are rules, obviously, around procurement and how that can or can't be done, there's also flexibility in what you're writing in there, what you actually want - in terms of delivering equality and in terms of delivering things for the community. That certainly should be done. It's something that I started work on in the terms of people employed. As soon as I became a councillor I thought it was really important to look at the benefits and the power you can get from procurement and social housing. We need as much variety of housing to meet every need in every local area as we can possibly have and social housing is a clear part of that yes.

Robin McAlpine: Every single word of everything you said there 100% on board with - this is what we've been campaigning on. I've been banging my head off - we wrote and published the report on procurement and its failures, it was written by Margaret Cuthbert a number of years ago. I do not understand why everybody agrees with it but nothing changes, I mean literally, everybody agrees with it, it's a mess. So number one, we've got a proposal, which is looking like it might come all the way through, for a Scottish National Infrastructure company, which would replace the Scottish Futures Trust. This would mean we were doing these things; one, in public ownership and two, to the highest possible standards. We should have procurement reform. If anyone hasn't heard of the Preston Model go and Google it - we should be using the Preston Model. Where, first you buy local and you support your local economy, and only then do you consider going beyond the local with your procurement - we should definitely be doing that.

> "Because while places are different, the work that we're doing to develop a place based approach to the living wage is recognising that places are very different, a lot of these issues are the same across the board.."
>
> *Lynn Anderson, Poverty Alliance*

The only thing that there is a slight difference with is we've tended not to use the term social housing but rather public rental. If you look where it really works, it's not just that you have social housing for those at the bottom which have 'failed', but rather, you see the choice of renting a high quality public house as being an option for everyone. Young professionals in Germany do not buy; they live in high quality rental housing. We've got a paper, I've got the first draft of it sitting on my desk, we think you can build passive house quality houses in Scotland, with a 3 bedroom house coming in at a rent of £500 per month, with no public subsidy whatsoever, if we get the proper financing right. That's the model where public rental housing is an option that you choose because of quality not desperation. That's what we really want to see. That's what will transform the housing market, but everything you said I agree with.

Andy Milne: Thank you.

Lynn Anderson - Poverty Alliance

Hi there, my names Lynn Anderson I work with the Poverty Alliance on the Living Wage Scotland team and we're practicing and developing a place based approach to promoting living wage accreditation. We're looking at different types of places - not just you know region, city, town level but even smaller communities than that. That was a really good point [Robin] made about wealth

creation in the economy and that that happens locally, but [regarding] the other observation that you were talking about; the tiers or spheres or layers of governance if you like. Are you concerned, Robin I guess is who the questions for, with the development of policy more at a city region level and that that's perhaps introducing another level of governance and power in the wrong direction rather than looking at a smaller level of community?

Following on from that point, this is maybe more of a question for Alison, talking about wealth creation and inequality and obviously my stuff being living wage - what's your view on how we build in these policy priorities ensuring adequate incomes for people? Because while places are different, the work that we're doing to develop a place based approach to the living wage is recognising that places are very different, a lot of these issues are the same across the board. So if there's not a shared vision to ensure that people have adequate income or to drive up wages, especially the point you've made about the majority of wealth creation is via wages - how do we achieve that if there is a desire to move to a more community level of governance? And what's the relationship with the city region deal developments too?

Andy Milne: Ok, thank you Lynn. So we are seeing quite an emphasis on that quite large scale city region thinking around regeneration, particularly physical infrastructure and regeneration. And secondly that interesting point that while places are very different for all sorts of reasons some of the main challenges that people are facing are the same - essentially about having a decent income to make their own choices.

Robin McAlpine: I was at a high level Scottish Government strategy event where about 30 important and powerful wealthy people, me and one novelist were brought in for the day. Genuinely, one novelist, me and a bunch of rich people to talk about Scotland's future challenges. One of the things, they had 50 future challenges, was that they drew a chart where one axis ran between definite and uncertain and the other ran between important and not important and we had to take all these problems and put them on a quadrant. If I tell you, I was in a group of 6 people with a: senior lawyer, a senior chief exec of a big company, couple of senior civil servants - I was the only person in the entire group who was willing to place the decline of Scotland's towns in the important half of the segment. Every single other person in that group believed it was inevitable but not important. I was standing there absolutely gobsmacked. City regions are how people who design economies on flip charts imagine the world - that's the problem. Just before we started, I was just reminiscing about 12 years ago when Scottish Enterprise, in which I was quite closely involved at the time, came up with a programme for what they were calling the Edinburgh/Glasgow Super City Region. So they were basically going to try and merge Glasgow and Edinburgh into one city with a corridor that ran along the M8. So basically Scotland would just be the one thing - just one giant Scottish Enterprise imagined neo-city! It didn't go anywhere because these are all the fantasies of people who don't actually have to work in the real world. City regions are not a thing. If you've got a city and then you've got a town and then you've got a town within a city you've got a bit of a city and a bit of the city.

Lynn Anderson: It's about spending and resource decisions though isn't it, and at what level?

Robin McAlpine: But yeah it's easy! There's a city there, you can press the city button super, and it's a simple thing to do, press the city button because it's there - it's not the right solution, it doesn't really work. City regions are basically assuming that the city's important and the regions need to be.

> "If you see the world as a place made out of cities everything else becomes unimportant - and the more that everything else declines, because you've neglected it, because you thought it was becoming unimportant."
> *Robin McAlpine*

It's a 'vampiric' relationship - the regions get a little bit of kick back (Andy - what relationship? vampiric?) 'Vampiric' - the regions become feeders for the city and then you watch the regions decline and people don't understand why the region is declining? I've done this as well - I was sitting with somebody and it was just after the steel works closed in

Motherwell a few years ago and they were discussing the future of Motherwell and this guy, literally, his only solution was –"there's lots of jobs in Glasgow we should improve the trains" but that was literally the only conception - from a senior policy maker. If you see the world as a place made out of cities everything else becomes unimportant - and the more that everything else declines, because you've neglected it, because you thought it was becoming unimportant -the more you become convinced that you were right; "see that towns in decline told ye" - You made it decline!

Lynn Anderson: We work on the premise that Scotland is a country of towns.

Robin McAlpine: It is

Lynn Anderson: Obviously there is a lot of focus on developing city region level economic development and cities' thriving is important but so are towns. So I think - Andy you made a point earlier about the interaction between these different layers, of all these policy developments happening at the same time but at different levels. I think there is a role for city region economic development and national strategies to address some of these problems that are common threads in all types of places - but at the same time paying attention to place based challenges.

Robin McAlpine: The place that a person lives, that doesn't matter, doesn't exist - everywhere that people live matters – Sorry!

Alison Evison: Before the election I was serving on the joint board of the Aberdeen city region deal, Aberdeen City and Shire, so this is something true to my heart. We spent a long time persuading people in Fraserburgh and other areas of Aberdeenshire that what was happening in Aberdeen City for the region deal was going to be of benefit to them. It was a huge selling thing to do - because how can something you do in Aberdeen City benefit people 50 miles away? And we had to work on that one. We did convince them, we convinced them on the terms of the economic spend going out, you know how you actually diversify the economy - in our case it was moving away from oil and gas to something else. It's not a natural thing to think that what happens in a city is going to benefit for your region. But that experience, we could do that, we could make that work- we could get the people in Fraserburgh voting for the city region deal for example. They did vote for it, it did happen. But it's something there to keep watching if the economic developments, economic gains, that were foreseen for people in other areas are not delivered.

Andy Milne: So it's too early to say if that's happened?

Alison Evison: Yes, but the argument was there, the problem was there; trying to address it, trying to sell it was a crucial part of what I was doing last year. At the moment we're in a waiting game to see if it does happen, so I'll come back to that in a few years' time. But the other point you made about wages, I think that's the starting point with that one. I think if the current systems not working - we have inequalities, we have areas where the living wage isn't paid, we have systems where people are poorer in one area than another, we haven't got an answer at the moment. We do need to look at that and do something different. At the moment the various authorities in Scotland are, as you are no doubt aware, trying [universal] basic income to see if that's a way of doing things. There are no answers to that one yet, that's currently going on as a trial to see if there is a different way to ensure that we can get rid of those inequalities. They don't have answers to that at the moment, it's currently being looked at, but some of the trials are looking at specific groups of people, maybe women, maybe rural areas, in particular areas as well as the city, to see if that's a way forward. But I think if we're looking at a local area, if we're trying to empower people to take part the economic development of their own area as well, you know you might think that real participation, real empowerment might be the answer we haven't got at the moment to all these things. Because at the moment it ain't working.

Andy Milne: Ok, Ian - Ian Manson

Ian Manson *Clyde Gateway*

Ian Manson, Clyde Gateway, I want Robin's agenda to be implemented and I work with a community in the East End of Glasgow who are not waiting to be empowered or given permission - who are making demands and through us and other work I was hearing some of these demands - jobs, houses etc. But if I want your agenda to be applied in Scotland then I need some help to be optimistic and optimism works as you know. So if I'm going to be as optimistic as you, I need to know what's changed in Scotland since 1974, when we collectively abolished exactly the local government structure that you want to see. What gives you

> "What's changed in Scotland since 1974, when we collectively abolished exactly the local government structures that you want to see. What gives you optimism that that structure put in front of the people again will be something they will support, use and enact?"
> *Ian Manson*

optimism that that structure put in front of the people again will be something they will support, use and enact. It's such an important point; as every small town in Scotland had its own council - you look at 40 years ago 50 years ago in the local paper then you'll see the decisions taken by these local councils. So what's changed and why are we so optimistic that this can actually happen? And I hope your right.

Robin McAlpine: Very straight forwardly, I've now seen a lot of examples of where it's worked - I'm not even going to run through them because there's so many, places where communities have taken control and turned it around. I mean Whitlawburn Housing Association, some of the things we've seen right across Scotland in terms of local development, recapturing of local assets and the use of them. And almost anything that happens in Nordic countries or Germany, Germanic countries, and to a large extent France. There's a very clear, very consistent academic analysis of this, which says there's two things that make people participate; number one is the extent to which they think their

actions count - so if you're in a place where they weigh the ballot papers the likelihood for you to participate is small. If your participation makes a difference, you participate. The second thing is - if the thing that you're participating in is perceived by you as having real power; so you can make a difference to this thing and this thing can actually make a difference to the community. Those are the two primary participatory elements.

Andy Milne: Were you talking more about the kind of political climate?

Ian Manson: Why are people going to want what you want?

Robin McAlpine: Because they fundamentally do - what's changed is we've been through a long period - they do, they fundamentally do! Everywhere I go people are talking about their frustrations about things they'd like to do locally but they can't.

Andy Milne: I think you and I probably broadly meet the same folk but I do meet a lot of folk who are still on the line of - we need less politicians, forgive me, we need less local authorities, we need less bureaucracies around us. Most people are not saying to me, although I think we do actually I agree with you, but I find it difficult to say; actually we need more elections, we need more politicians, we need more layers of government. I'm kind of with Ian on this I'm not sure if the appetite is already there.

Robin McAlpine: As part of the Our Democracy Campaign, which is really worth going and having a look at. It's a coalition of many organisations that do this, we polled - 60% plus want to see more politicians.

Andy Milne: Really?

Robin McAlpine: Yup! If you read the Daily Mail. If you say to them politicians, community politicians in your area, do you want more? The majority of people say yes. And you can argue against and keep reading the Daily Mail and think that's the world - that it's different from this; this is not how people are feeling.

Andy Milne: I don't actually read the Daily Mail that much

Robin McAlpine: But that doesn't mean there are another 40% of people that have not been persuaded yet. But if you reverse it the other way - if you go to a place where this is working, a country where this is working.

Andy Milne: I don't need to be convinced; I don't think we need to be convinced of the benefits. I think the question is more about the appetite for it - is it really there beyond this room? Alison

Alison Evison: People want three things done. People get fed up when things aren't being done; when things aren't being achieved; when their needs aren't being met locally. And that's what we've all got to see delivered - people want to have what they need happening. They want to have the money they're putting in, even though only a tiny percentage of local government money comes from council tax, people believe their council tax pays for everything and they want to see what they're getting as a return for their money. They want to see that. When the system all falls down is when they don't feel they're getting anything in their local area; they feel their needs aren't being met and they're feeling they don't have a say in it - and if they do have a say in it, they get ignored afterwards anyway so what's the point. Those are the things we want to put right, and I think if we do that at the local government level then I think people will be far more involved in what they're doing. I think getting the actions put in place is the answer to that one

Andy Milne: So it needs a start. Ok so we've got two questions then at the back - man at the back then third row from the back

Andy Colvin, *East Ayrshire Council*

Andy Colvin, I'm a community worker from through in East Ayrshire. Speaking earlier on I wouldn't say my views would be particularly representative of the local authority - although we've got some good points. It was just to pick up on the point about - I don't see any great demand for more politicians, for more elected members. I would agree with that, to an extent, when you think - when you add in the elected members bit there isn't a great deal of demand. But every community I work in, I work with a lot of good people day in day out doing a lot of good work, they want a seat at the table; they want some of the power. And that's putting it down - they want it as local as they can drive it. I have seen benefits, as I can also see for the regional stuff. I fear this is just more centralisation. I work with a lot of elected members and they think if you're not sitting in the cabinet "what can I do?" and that's elected members themselves. In actual local authorities, I don't even like using the word because of how big they are, even the elected members are saying "if we're not in that cabinet" when it's happening - they're being disempowered. So I'd like to see - push the power down.

Andy Milne: Ok so that's really interesting then. A disconnection between people wanting to be involved, wanting so see things enacted, but then seeing councillors as something different. And then your latter point about councillors not always being at the centre of power and there being really quite a hierarchy of centralised decision making there. We'll take another point before we go to comment.

Paul Teedon *Glasgow Caledonian University*

My name's Paul Teedon, I have a vested interest as I'm part of the evaluation team for Participatory Budgeting (PB). I've also got a different hat; I'm doing work on private water in rural areas, so it relates to two issues. I'd genuinely like to hear your comments on how you see things like PB and community buyouts and land reform as transformative, or are they just fragmentations across government roles? (Andy - Fragmentations as?) Well basically, there are lots of small things going on that we don't necessarily see joined up. And the second thing; we've heard a lot of things today about local authorities and local government and although Robin talked in passing about rural Scotland, I wonder, and I apologise if I've not read the terms of reference for the review, there doesn't seem to have been any conversations about large scale land ownership. There is a proposal by the Scottish Government to establish 7 new national parks, all of which are going to have responsibility for making decisions. Then there's a question mark about how democratic they are, so I'm just wondering whether the countervailing things going on right now. I'll stop there.

Andy Milne: Ok - I'm going to take two further points before we come back on this, so Judy?

Judy Wilkinson *Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society*

It comes back to sort of the size of the sphere. I had a discussion last week with Annanhill Allotments. So we had a local review discussion on the allotments and that actually engaged people - because they were looking at what they wanted to do in their sites and how they wanted to manage them. Allotments are sustainable for themselves but it was actually the outreach, in terms of engaging the local community with the health community, with the structure of that. Now looking at Glasgow; what area would then be the budgeting area or decision-making area that would relate to this local group? They were talking about whether it would start with the wards, so therefore you had say two

or three wards around there, is that the right size? Or what size would you start disseminating this down? And I think actually to get people engaged, it comes back to East Ayrshire, is people's interest and we have a lot of people - we went to three different sites and all of them were engaging with their local community. They're providing some of the services that are needed. They were really interested in this, and I think I haven't heard here any of this partnership co-working philosophy, that for me comes from local government. So you've got to start it at a local level, which is peoples interest groups and what they're interested in and then how you do you scale it up? How do you get it up? And at what levels of governance do you take what decisions?

Andy Milne: Ok so there's kind of a connection between that Participatory Budgeting and is it fragmented over the piece or is it some structured transformative process and then lastly.

Kay Morris *Living Streets Scotland*

Kay Morris from Living Streets Scotland. I guess I kind of want to follow on a little bit from what you were saying and talk a little bit about, very pragmatically, control of the mechanisms of participation and equity of access to participation. Is there not a way for people to actively participate? Just thinking about the job that I do; working very much at a local level with different communities all over Scotland looking at the immediate - the streets outside their houses and the places they work and their high streets. I'm working with a group of sheltered housing residents, in a local authority area I won't name, who can't make literally a 5 minute journey from their sheltered housing complex to the main street, where they can access everything their heart could possibly desire, because of the state of the pavement. I've been working with them now for about 18 months to have something done about this. We've had councillors in, we've had community planning partners in, we've had business owners come in - we've had all sorts of people come in and speak very warmly to the residents about what they want to do but getting it written down and taking action is a different matter. Just how do I get this paving stone reset? People can be very actively keen to participate but I think there is almost a sense of the processes, of being able to ask for something as simple as having the pavement fixed, are so complex and so opaque that even trying to do something as straight forward as that feels like a mountain to climb. I shouldn't really have to be there helping these people to pick up the phone to make this happen.

Andy Milne: No, good point. So those two last points quite similar in as much as it's about trying to find the right connections for making actual change happen, particularly when it's potentially significant change at the local level, how to scale that up. About participatory budgeting, that's one of a range of measures being quite heavily promoted by the Scottish Government along its community empowerment lines. Is that genuine? Does that look like there's transformative potential there or is it more fragmented and people are just getting bedazzled by all the different stuff that's going on? And last point at the back, counter to our earlier discussion, there does seem to be a willingness for people to get involved and to take responsibility - but then there's some sort of odd quantum leap between that and a councillor who is most often a volunteer who has become an elected position. And then that last leap between your local councillors, I was speaking to somebody else in the room about this earlier on, about their councillor being very supportive but not really being in power in any meaningful sense within the local authority.

Alison Evison: This is why we need the Review of Local Governance, we need to have all these ideas teased out, we need this put forward and we need to find a better way that addresses all these issues, so there is something ongoing. I hope you're able to feed in your ideas formally into that as well. I was very interested in this equity in effect, equity in participation and how do we ensure access for everybody. In my ward we held some meetings in the local care home, so people who are care home residents can actually feel they're involved. So, we go in there and have our meetings in the care home - again it's that local area. What works most to get everybody feeling they're engaged? Whatever group they are in society. That's an issue that will hopefully come out of the Review of Local Governance as well - how do we make sure that participation is for everybody? We don't want to create a new autocracy- we want to spread out that participation. That representation is necessary for people to feel that everyone's included in it. So you're raising questions there that I think we will have to tease out as we move forward in the next months.

I think the comments about the allotments were really interesting as well. Again, my local councillor hat on, comes back to that all the time - how do we take what's happening, all that good work that's happening in the allotments and help it in another area? Now that's linking very much to the locality planning that's going on at the moment, to see everything as a whole. An allotment is obviously for the environment; it's obviously health and wellbeing; it's education - It's covering lots and lots of different strands. How do we do that? To take all that stuff and make it part of our community work. I think the problem we've got at the

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> *Kay Morris, Living Streets Scotland*

moment is there are locality plans and locality schemes in many different ways and local areas are trying to address hundreds of things at once. What we need to do is get more direction and find out what we understand by locality. That, will again, come out of the Review of Local Governance and see where we're moving forward with that as well.

Participatory Budgeting was another question. I myself find this a really exciting prospect and the chance of for a local community to directly meet the needs of that community - by money coming to them to fund their local area. I think in practice we're very much on the early stages of this at the moment, there's a lot, I was talking to a councillor the other day who said – "we can't do PB because how do we know what the moneys going to be spent on?" There's an answer to that - but that's the stage I think we're still at, and I think it's something that has huge potential to get the local community feeling engaged. We've said already that people will feel engaged if they're feeling that their needs are being met and they're getting something out of it

Andy Milne: Something in also getting the councillors themselves engaged in what that is and what the implications are.

Alison Evison: Well exactly, that's the work we're on at the moment. The work is to spread what PB is all about and make sure people understand it and see that it's actually a good thing. So, there's

work going on with that at the moment. I don't think we've got an answer at the moment with all the little trials that are taking place- we need to see what learning comes out of those.

Andy Milne: So could I just ask you on that Alison, I've come up against this on a number of occasions and people do talk about this quite a lot - about the degree of willingness of people who hold power at the moment to be prepared to give it away, in this case for individual councillors. I mean I've seen instances where, at least initially, [councillors] feel some degree of threat that a decision making process that they would normally have themselves is being given away to groups of people that they're not very clear about - that they're worried might not be representative enough.

Alison Evison: You know I think we need to think about this in a wider whole - we need to see it that councillors are there to meet the needs of their community, however they perceive those needs to be. So the more engagement going on with the community the more accurate understanding of those needs is going to be - so that's a key point for that one.

Paul Teedon: Sorry, my question really wasn't about PB because I've been looking at PB for three years. My question really was how it fits in to a broader scheme of policies and whether those are fragmented? That's really why - PB is just one example.

Alison Evison: That maybe links to what you're saying as well; at the moment a lot of money coming to local government is coming with ring fencing and particular needs you've got to address, then a lot of it's going out to other things, so that maybe councils are feeling nervous about what's happening. I think we've got to have an overall, if you look at local government funding, what money's available to a local government and how they can use that to meet what the communities want. I think in doing so you'll be addressing that reluctance to do with PB as well. Whether things are becoming too fragmented, whether that's not right, at the moment there is little clarity over the whole process and we need to make sure that that understanding grows. I think it comes back to that sense of looking at the Review of Local Governance and at what communities need. It comes back to looking at local areas and recognising that and trying to get rid of some of this surplus stuff we've got going on at the moment - to have a particular direction through it all.

Andy Milne: Ok I think that's really interesting, about having to let go of other stuff as well. It does feel at the moment that we're in some kind of point of flux. There's kind of general agreement that where we are at the moment is not where we wish to be and some general consensus around concerns around centralisation - notwithstanding some individuals that we meet from time to time. But the question is about making that transition. Robin can you say something about this kind of hierarchy of participation and how that's seen - between people getting involved and doing good stuff, and everybody pats those people on the back and says that's great, then as soon as they become councillors they become some kind of different animal all together and then by the time they get further up the tree we just make fun of them all the time.

Robin McAlpine: I'm going to use a phrase from the Wire, the fabulous TV series the Wire, which I heard recently that does capture a lot of the problems with politics and it's very simple - one of characters says – "come to do good; stay to do well". Now that perception, that the system sucks you in and rewards you for being part of system, that's every bureaucracy that a humans ever created since - actually I've got a quote that I stick up somewhere where someone says "they were consistently organising us into new teams but the management kept believing if they did another reorganisation it would keep us on our toes and that that reorganisation would get more out of us but instead we were with a whole bunch of people that didn't know what we were doing". I'm looking at this I'm thinking that's exactly right - that's a quote from 3000BC from way before. Now

this is true of all human structures, what we've got a particular problem of in Scotland, that's true of every democracy - every question that came out there was actually around about the same thing.

There are two things that are going on here; on the one hand, we do not have in Scotland, what you would call a properly powerful functioning 20th century democracy. 20th century democracy was about taking the power to make policy and decisions and spreading it out to the people - to the population as a whole. Now we had that and we've slipped back from that. We are the most centralised and least democratic country, certainly in Europe and North America probably wider than that. Now that's where we start from, we've got this incredible centralisation and what's happened - it's the fragmentation problem. There's another thing that's happening just now where we're going into a phase globally, which is the next phase of democracy, which is not representative but participatory. Now some of this is very well tried and some of it is still a bit more experimental. We're feeling our way into this new model, whereby, it's not just about; you select a representative and you bugger off for 4 years, then you come back and you select another one, but rather that you can be involved all the way through the process.

Now that, I'm hoping, is what's going to save Western democracy because it's in a serious problem at the moment. At the moment we've got this thing where far too many people in government believe that democracy is a precursor to government. So you do democracy, then you stop doing democracy while you do government and you government for four years, then you do a little bit of democracy, then you stop doing democracy and you go back and do government. Now that's the old model and bluntly that's what's caused Trump and Brexit - that professionalised attitude to politics, that the public are just there to select between a group of professionals. This participatory model is, for my money, the thing that takes us into the future whereby that breaks down, that change and people suddenly realise they can get involved.

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>
> Robin McAlpine

The problem we've got in Scotland is that we're trying to build a new participatory system on a spine which isn't capable of bearing the weight. So rather than fix the spine which says that we do not have a proper [local government] - I mean I'm a big fan of local democracy but let's not kid on that our local authorities that we've got are not in themselves horrendously centralised. My local authority abolished public meetings. It has four meetings of the full council a year that last for about 15 minutes, of the executive, then all the decisions are made in sub-groups and sub-committees because they didn't want to have the scrutiny. Let's not kid on our local authorities are perfect, but this is because they've got nothing below them keeping them to account. So, what we've ended up doing is we're trying to fix the spine by loading on more and more and baubles.

Andy Milne: And the alternative is?

Robin McAlpine: The alternative is fix the middle and then use this in an integrated way; which says actually the reason we're doing Participatory Budgeting is because we think people should have more say over how their money's spent and, if that's what we mean, then also this follows and this follows and we should do those things to - so it becomes systematic and not sporadic. Those two things have to be done next to each other.

Andy Milne: So at the back - then Martin here

Ruth Donnelly *Glasgow City HSCP*

Hello, Ruth Donnelly of Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), like the guy from Glasgow Caledonian, not representative of the NHS or the HSCP. I absolutely agree with the principle of what Robin was saying, however, I would be concerned that the ability to take power, if it's devolved, is not evenly spread just now. So, cognisance would need to be given to the people that experience the worst inequalities just now, [who] don't necessarily have the time or the head space to be getting involved in community activity. I think there is a missing layer of services really at that very local level that will free people up to then participate. Also, I would be slightly concerned that we, first of all, think [these ideas] through, so that we're not increasing the burden of responsibility on to very local areas for, kind of, deciding their own fate. I think we've got this

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kind of drive towards individualism in society more generally, but actually you can see through things like PIP and even the Pupil Equity Fund; we've devolved these decisions right the way down, so if they don't work out then where does the blame sit? So absolutely - principle is great. But I think we need to think; how do we not inadvertently make inequalities worse? Because I think the most able, the most articulate, the most educated will organise first and will have the loudest voices.

Andy Milne: A point very well made and one that SURF has pushed all the way through the debate about the Community Empowerment Act and you see some quite significant evidence of that

Martin Allen: You mentioned the Community Empowerment Act- does that not actually remove individual's ability to represent themselves in communities? And they actually have to join a local group to be recognised in a lot of issues in relation to areas of re-development?

Andy Milne: There's a definition of community groups within that that's right.

Martin Allen: So there's nothing democratic in a lot of that. Because community starts with someone walking along the street and saying hello their neighbour - everything else builds up to that. But I'm just going back to the same points because I'm disagreeing with quite lot of what I'm hearing here. Robin you mentioned a quote from about 3000 years ago about reinventing the wheel, and then you're sitting talking about reinventing the wheel - when nobodies even tried to fix the puncture. Now we're moving on from wheels, wheels are going to become extinct, and our needs are going to become extinct in the near future. So, what you're saying to me and what I'm hearing is you're going to put something in place and then ten years somebody is going to say; "well I have a little tire" - rather than just trying to fix what's in place the now.

Now I'll go back to community councils, community councils should be operating whether they're a statutory body, they shouldn't have any financial control - they should absolutely have financial scrutiny. The lady spoke there just about footpaths and councillors can't get that sorted. So, I think it's a bit wrong to say that community councils are a wee bit less capable, when they've got zero resources. But here's the question I've got and it's in relation to governance and power - who voted you in, Alison, to represent me? In relation to your position now in terms of COSLA and Robin, who voted you in to represent me? In relation to your influence on the Scottish Government when you are one person sitting round a table with 30 other organisations.

Andy Milne: Ok, so a question on accountability which I'm sure we'll get an answer on. But first of all, this question about unintended consequences of opening up systems, in a way in which people with greater resources, greater existing position, can take greater advantage, thereby unintentionally creating greater inequalities. And then about, you're not a representative as such as I understand it Robin, but you'll be able to say Alison on that latter point from Martin. Robin?

Robin McAlpine: Ok on the first one, on the power, this is the problem, if it's volunteers - people with the most capacity to volunteer win. That's why I want to make it universal and the proposal that we've got says that everybody involved would get, the local-ist tier, wouldn't get a salary, but would absolutely get recompense for any costs that it took them and you would integrate better things like childcare. There's an assumption that meetings would be arranged around work time, so you would have evening meetings rather than lunch time meetings, then people don't need time off work. You can put these kind of things in. The problem is, inevitably, there's always differential levels of participation anywhere and what you find is the more successful a local democracy is - the greater the participation. Part of the reason we get the poor participation is because, let me put it like this, again another piece of academic research work I saw done on this issue in Scotland. It was on the people that didn't participate in local government and their responses were sophisticated, and clever and, bluntly, right. Because what they were saying was; "I don't vote in local government", why?, "it's a waste of time, genuinely a waste of time - my local authority, my vote, won't make any difference, my local authority will do the same thing anyway - it's a waste of my time". They believed they were the rational ones and it's hard to disagree with them. So, you've got to make it such that they are the ones that are feeling that it's powerful, worthwhile and useful, and then they do engage. And there's no exception to that, if people don't think it's powerful - they won't engage. If they don't feel that they're valued they won't engage - you've got to make the structure first. I'm not saying, build it and they will come, not quite, I'm saying - they certainly won't come if you don't build it, let me put it that way round.

> "It's the social media era, people expect to have the capacity to participate and if we keep saying to them "that's some new-fangled thing we're not doing that" they will punish us"
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> Robin McAlpine

Just to say, where did I get my power from - what power? I publish policy papers, we argue for them, that's all we do, we don't have any power. I'm not elected by anybody and so this is just part of a national discussion. I agree with you that it would be great - we should be creating structures and systems which allow ordinary people to get more involved, but I also think that we've got to remember that at the heart of this there's got to be accountability and one person can't be held

accountable. I'm a big fan of the straightforward maxim that people who run things on my behalf, I must be able to fire them. Now that's why in the final decision making, when you're making laws and you're spending people's money, there's got to be an accountability between those whose money you're spending and those over whom the laws and the powers, that you're wielding, impact. Now what I think the big, now you were talking about wheels, problem is, first we need to get the puncture fixed, and then we need to recognise the wheels working fine, but it's not carrying the right thing. We need to keep building on it. I'm presuming you're not still using a Nokia flip phone? In ten years you use new phone technologies. In the same time period new processes, new practices emerge in government and if we don't accept that things move forward - it's the social media era, people expect to have the capacity to participate, and if we keep saying to them "that's some new-fangled thing we're not doing that" they will punish us, because that's what's happening everywhere else. They're all moving forward in this direction. The mayor of France - you should go and look at the French Participatory Budgeting system, it makes ours look really weak. They put aside a substantial amount of budget each year and every regional part of Paris literally gets to propose any ideas that they want, put them to a deliberative vote and whoever comes top, they get the money and the councillors don't get the veto them. It's popular and it works.

Andy Milne: Thank you, Alison?

Alison Evison: Yeah, the comments made over there are so important to what we're doing at the moment. We're talking about who will be able to volunteer to take part in all this community representation. We have the same problem with the elected council at the moment; a local councillor will earn £16,000 a year - who can afford to be a local councillor on £16,000 a year? There are huge barriers to elected office. I talked in my speech about the lack of diversity and we need to have more diversity amongst local councillors and that is a situation, a problem we've got now. Already people need a second income of some kind to be able to be a councillor at the moment and without that they can't. There was issues raised about childcare, about barriers to disabled people, they all exist in the current system and we don't need a new system to have to fix those. Basically, we've got to fix them. We've got to remove the barriers to anybody getting involved. The other point you made about communities getting involved I think is a really important point as well. If I look across the area I know best – Aberdeenshire. We've got some areas where communities are really well engaged, well experienced, can just go whoosh with the community empowerment and everything's brilliant and other areas which need a lot of help. I know SURF is doing work along these lines as well. That is an area we've got to focus on and I think that's a role for local government to go in and help communities feel empowered. Local councillors and government, as a whole, try and encourage that because otherwise we are going to increase the inequalities. We're not going to get the system we want. We're going to get greater inequalities, and we're going to be in a worse situation than we are now. That is a crucial area.

I was also interested in what you said about the burden of responsibility going down to local areas. I think there's a crucial balance to get right. If we're not getting that balance right we'll end up with greater centralisation because we'll have this community and that community, with that community not having enough power to do anything, against what central government wants to come and impose on them. We need to have some sort of system where all these local communities can actually work together and have that voice on the national stage, and that's where local government comes in. That's what we're here to do, to be that voice for all the communities in our local area, and I think that's a crucial voice to keep. I think we've seen with the PEF money - [Pupil Equity Fund](#), some areas are able to do that and some areas aren't able to do it. We need to make sure that there

is a sense that you do have strong local communities and a strong voice for local communities comes from that local government area as well.

I was interested in what you said about the person on the street, well, in the Scotland I know people live in communities, people work with each other, talk with each other and engage with each other. I don't know many people that are actually real individuals totally on their own. I think most people live, work, play, engage - there are obviously some that don't but I think on a whole people live in communities and what we do with our system of governance will hopefully reflect that people live in communities. I don't directly represent you, not at all, I was elected as a councillor to represent to people in my ward; North Kincardine in Aberdeenshire, they voted for me in the local elections, and I represent those people. In the wider sense I'm a councillor in Aberdeenshire so recognise them. As I've said to you already COSLA is a membership organisation; the members of COSLA decide who's going to be their president. (Martin - so the Chief Executives of each local authority?) No they are appointments, they are jobs, not elected.

Andy Milne: Ok, so we're in the last 5 minutes or so of this main open phase of the debate so if you've got a particular point that you want to make now would be a good time. Here we are.

Nick Bland *Scottish Government*

I'm Nick from the Scottish Government; I've been contributing to the Local Governance Review. I've been listening very carefully to the range of views that have been put out here today. There's a clear focus on the need for change and discussion about what that change might look like. The Local Governance Review is recognition of the need for the space for that change. So the Local Governance Review, now underway, that space, that vehicle, this period of time to debate what that change should look like, to tackle the issues that we've been talking about today. I would like to use this opportunity to publicise the next phase of that which is just about to start. I just wanted to kind of chime on a number of principles which have been mentioned by various people today which underline the purpose of the Local Governance Review.

So first of all, this is about delivering better outcomes and tackling inequalities - we're not considering technical changes for technical sake. This is about allowing communities and helping communities to thrive and to tackle inequalities within those communities and across those communities. It is about a principle that more decisions should be taken more locally, that decisions that are taken closer to where they have effect will be better. That's principle to the Local Governance Review - this isn't about universalism, this is about an approach which would allow different kinds of participation on different kinds of issues which reflect the differences of communities. This isn't about participation vs representation, a point that Councillor Evison made. This is very much about saying - within our system of democracy how does participation, in all its forms, of which you could say representation is one, work? And what is our mix of participation? What is our route to participation? Within our democracy and within our communities. And I suppose finally, the important role of arbitration across communities. This notion of arbitration that was mentioned by Councillor Evison is very important. So those are some of the underlying principles which are driving the thinking of the Local Governance Review.

Just to say a bit in terms of communication of the next phase, so we're moving now into the next six months which is very much about having debates like these within communities in Scotland. To support what we've been working on with a group of people from the community sector, third sector, public sector and COSLA in partnership to develop a suite of materials and a set of questions that help support that conversation. That should be available after the bank holiday weekend on the

Local Governance Review website and will be put out via our group of community sector equalities networks. They will be going out into communities to encourage people to take part in this conversation and there will be a fund available, through the Voluntary Action Fund, of grants of between £100 and £300 to support those conversations. So there will be money available to support people to hold those conversations in their communities.

Andy Milne: So that's really helpful Nick, so SURF's ahead of the game. This is the debate here but now you're going into the phase where you're going to actually support that process more at a local level. That's all in this first phase isn't it? As I understand it, concentrating on what we've mostly talked about today between local authorities and the variations of communities that they serve. There is a second phase, which is more about the larger scale architecture of Scottish Enterprise and Health Boards and others, which have been mentioned.

Nick Bland

So the Local Governance Review takes in all spheres of government, it is about that principle of decisions being taken as close as possible to where they have effect. This first strand, as we've described it, is very much focussed on that community decision making level, local decision making level. There is another strand which is much more focussed on that; regional local authority, community planning partnership, regional economic partnership level. That is a strand that we hope will begin next month. We're still in discussion with COSLA about precisely how to make that invitation but we will be looking for those levels, those spheres, to come forward with propositions about how governance could change. So this is about governance in Scotland across the different spheres.

Andy Milne: Right - more information to come on that

 End of Transcript

About SURF

SURF is Scotland's Regeneration Forum.

Aims and objectives
SURF's overall objective is to improve the lives and opportunities of residents in Scotland's disadvantaged communities. To meet this goal, SURF's key aims are:

- To provide a neutral space for all sectors and players in Scottish community regeneration to share their knowledge and experience
- To stimulate challenging debate about community regeneration policy and practice
- To maintain a high status for community regeneration on Scotland's political agenda
- To provide relevant and constructive feedback to key policy-makers

SURF Network
The SURF network is the primary arena for debate on community regeneration in Scotland. It acts as a channel for information, consultation and policy proposals, based on the knowledge and experience of its extensive membership and wider connections.

SURF network activity includes seminars, conferences, international policy exchanges, the annual SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration and the distribution of information and comment in a variety of formats.

This all provides a truly independent network to explore current practice, experience and knowledge, with which to positively influence the development of successful regeneration policy and practice.

Background

SURF was established in 1992 as a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is directed by a board of voluntary directors drawn from across its wide cross-sector membership of over 280 organisations.

SURF members range in size from small community groups to some of Scotland's largest private companies. Membership organisations also include local authorities, housing associations, health boards, academic institutions, professional bodies, voluntary organisations and charities.

Since its inception, SURF has operated from two basic principles:

1. Successful and sustainable regeneration is only achievable when all aspects of physical, social, economic and cultural regeneration are addressed in a holistic approach.

2. The people who are the intended beneficiaries of any regeneration effort must be meaningfully involved in the process if it is to be successful in planning, implementation and maintenance.

Further Information

Information on SURF's activities and how to get more involved is readily available on our website.

Please click here to sign up to our e-mailing list to keep up-to-date with SURF news and events.

SURF in 2018

Throughout 2018 SURF will be delivering a wide range of activities in four interlinked work streams:

- **Supporting Practice** through the further development of our investigative Alliance for Action regeneration research programme;
- **Promoting Success** in the 2018 SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration;
- **Informing and Linking** with our, Annual Conference, our magazine and event outcome reports;
- **Developing Policy** by building on our 2016 manifesto process and responding to policy consultations.

End of report

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SURF website: www.surf.scot