

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

This summarises the case for **EFFECTIVE** citizen engagement in decision making. Evidence provided in this summary quantifies the many benefits; the case is made as to why the engagement process is needed now more than ever; suggestions are provided as to how to deliver a well supported strategy and process.

THE EVIDENCE QUANTIFYING THE BENEFITS

I've been involved in community engagement for many years.¹

There is plenty of evidence demonstrating the benefits of **EFFECTIVE** citizen engagement.² Improved quality of life is the aim. The enabling process ensures alignment of policies, programmes and work by a multitude of organisations; builds and uses expertise in organisations and citizens; improves community capacity/skills; integrates regeneration with health, environment, poverty, inequality and so on.³

WHY CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IS NEEDED

Apart from the clear benefits above, there are three main reasons why citizen engagement should be considered to:

1. Address escalating climate change and associated issues.
2. Create more resilient communities post Covid.
3. Take advantage of new technologies,⁴ working patterns, retail⁵ and wealth retention within the area.

Research again quantifies the benefits of citizen engagement in the above future scenarios.⁶

HOW TO DELIVER AN EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Citizen partnership working is challenging, time consuming and long term.⁷

To ensure **EFFECTIVE** engagement these are the key issues that need to be addressed:

- Process not fully understood by authorities and other agencies – they fail to engage and resource.
- Too many policies and plans by too many agencies – often work against each other rather than with each other.
- Inadequate and/or disjointed resources to ensure engagement is fair.
- Partnerships (and in particular citizens) loose interest because of slow progress.

¹ References can be supplied.

² For example see scdc.org.uk; ashden.org; pcancities.org.uk; escrow.ukri.org; civocracy.com

³ See Appendix 1 and scdc.org.uk.

⁴ In particular evolving energy provision and demand management, artificial intelligence, electric/autonomous transport and the change from an extractive to regeneration economy.

⁵ Community Ownership Key to Survival of the British High Street – powertochange.org.uk.

⁶ See citizen assemblies on climate change such as in Ireland and England (citizenassembly.ie and climateassembly.uk). Refer also to devonclimateemergency.org.uk and pcancities.org.uk. Recent Lottery funding for climate change was very heavily oversubscribed – as were others.

⁷ My observations over many years.

- Lack of succession strategy and continuation resources for the long term.

Practical experience and research (see above references) identifies a tried and tested community development process. See in particular the Scottish Community Development Centre (scdc.org.uk) and others.

The process can be summarised⁸ as setting the **VISION** – what is to be achieved; how to achieve this via the **MISSION**; agreeing **CORE VALUES** to ensure a fair transition; agreeing a **STRATEGY** – how to use the mission statement; setting **GOALS** of general statements of what is needed; agreeing more specific targets (milestones) – **OBJECTIVES** and the carrying out the **ACTION PLANS**.

In order to carry out this process adequate resources are needed. The current financial constraints are known but there may be ways to address this. Authorities may like to consider new ways of aligning say officer support into community development, realign any available resources or consider new ways of funding – Community Municipal Investments for example.⁹ It is estimated that for the population of Mid Devon (80,000) there is about £3.2 BILLION of investable wealth, much of which flows out the area.¹⁰

Also the Covid restrictions around meetings will have to be considered as engagement processes relies on people coming together!

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⁸ See Appendix 2 for a brief overview. The Scottish Community Development Centre (scdc.org.uk) amongst others provides more details.

⁹ Refer to pcancities.org.uk recent research “Residents want local authorities to act on climate change and to be part of the solution”.

¹⁰ HMRC – ISA statistics & ONS UK Wealth Data. See also purpose-foundation.com & rfsocialfinance.org and others for emerging models of alternative ownership and financing.

APPENDIX 1

A model of community development

Figure 1



APPENDIX 2

AN EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROCESS ENSURES YOU FOCUS ON WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE AND HOW YOU GET THERE

CITIZEN ASSEMBLY



All partners/stakeholders agree the **VISION** – where they want to be

FOR EXAMPLE: “An improved environment” “A better place to live”

The **MISSION** is also agreed – how do we work together to achieve the vision

FOR EXAMPLE: “To work together to reduce our environmental impact”

The **CORE VALUES** are agreed

FOR EXAMPLE: “Ensure all are included” “Practice high ethical standards”
“Respect peoples’ viewpoints” “Listen and don’t criticise”
“Environmental improvements are key to all actions”

**ALL OF THE ABOVE NEEDS TO BE SUCCINCT, SIMPLE AND EASY TO REMEMBER – KEEPS ALL
“PULLING IN THE SAME DIRECTION”**

Now agree the **STRATEGY** – outline plan of getting to the vision

Break into working groups

FOR EXAMPLE: YOUTH BUSINESS FOOD TRANSPORT TOURISM ENERGY
Assembly agrees on what groups are relevant to their area
– all will of course interlink but keep to no more than say SIX

NOW DECIDE EITHER TO CARRY ON WITH THIS ASSEMBLY OR CALL ANOTHER

Each working group decides important issues to be addressed – leading to GOALS

FOR EXAMPLE: The YOUTH group is taken as an example below.

All groups elect a spokesperson/leader and work up their GOALS, OBJECTIVES and initial ACTION PLAN. They report back to ASSEMBLY – this ensures sectoral links, opportunities for innovation, other needs and so on.

ASSEMBLY agrees and understands groups goals, objectives and action plans

WORKING GROUPS are supported and mentored to deliver their agreed action plans

All action plans are integrated into ONE – ensures milestones and deliverables are achieved, view as living documents, use GANNT charts, publish simple progress reports to all stakeholders and public, collates important data. Keep reviewing by further assemblies/focus groups

AN EXAMPLE – YOUTH WORKING GROUP



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Adheres to the agreed VISION, CORE VALUES AND MISSION

Adds to and develops own STRATEGY

FOR EXAMPLE – use local youth leaders to help develop our environmental action plan

Our GOAL – recruit local youth leaders interested and experienced in helping us develop our action plan

Our OBJECTIVE – contact and create a database of all individuals by 1 March

Our ACTION PLAN:

Form our small group to recruit local leaders.

Identify any resources and support we need to contact them.

Create a database of potential leaders including their skills and support they may offer.

Contact them individually to explain the project.

Aim to get at least 50% agreeing how they can help us expand our action plan.

Agree the next steps post 1 March.

This group reports back to project coordinator – for central documentation, ensures on track, identifies any additional resources needed.

There will be lots of issues to deal with as they develop the next stages. A key one will be to keep interest up – small amounts of funding for example will enable some key projects to be delivered (essential to show things are “happening”). So practical delivery has to complement environmental action planning.

The group reports back and presents to assembly meetings – this provides for cross sector linking, identification of innovation, new skills, ideas, training job opportunities and additional support.

Action planning continues as a living document to constantly address the project deliverables and
DELIVERING QUANTIFIABLE TARGETS: