

## City Voice - Newsletter No. 47

Welcome to the 47<sup>th</sup> citizens' panel newsletter. This newsletter gives you a brief summary of the results of the 47<sup>th</sup> questionnaire on "Community Empowerment" which you received in June 2023, along with a service response "this is what we are doing".

The questions included in this community empowerment edition of City Voice have been chosen by the members of Community Planning Aberdeen's Community Empowerment Group. The Group's ambition is for all communities across Aberdeen to be equal community planning partners. The Community Empowerment Strategy sets out this ambition along with the different ways we will achieve this. To help us understand if the strategy is making a difference, we wanted to ask panel members about how empowered they feel in their local community now. Many of the questions have been inspired by the Place Standard which is a recognised framework used for assessing places.

A total of 793 questionnaires were sent out to panellists and we received 400 completed questionnaires – equivalent to a response rate of 50.4%. This is lower than the response rate for City Voice 46 (61.3%) but higher than the response rate achieved in surveys prior to the panel re-fresh conducted in 2022.

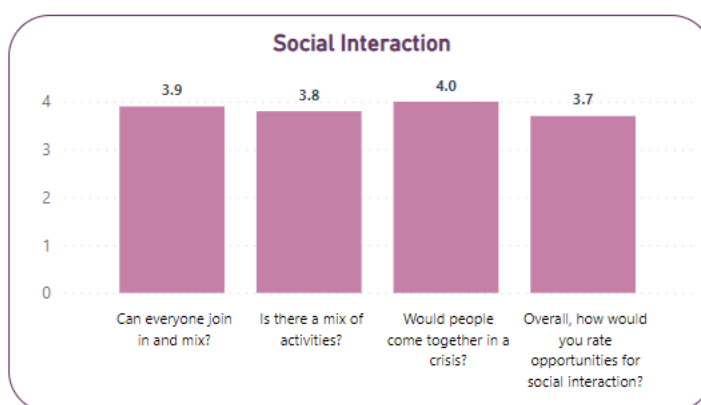
## Your neighbourhood

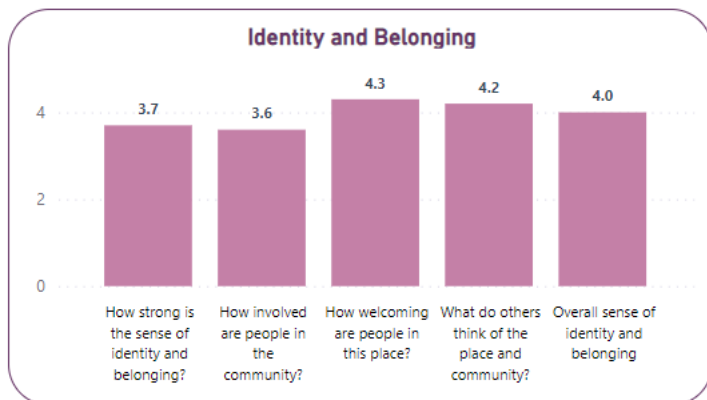
In this first section of the questionnaire, panellists were asked to answer the questions with their local neighbourhood in mind, but to think about/consider the wider area it sits in if this helped them to answer the questions.

**Social interaction:** The first set of questions asked about social interaction (opportunities to meet and spend time with other people). When asked where people get together, the most commonly selected option was food and drink outlets (63.7% of respondents). Other common places were local halls and centres, places of worship and schools (over 50% in each case). Popular ways to find out what is happening were through friends/family/neighbours at 69% with social media being the next most common at 57.3%.

In the next questions, participants were asked to give a score on a scale of 1-7, where 1 = lots of room for improvement and 7 = very little room for improvement. Mean scores were calculated for each question.

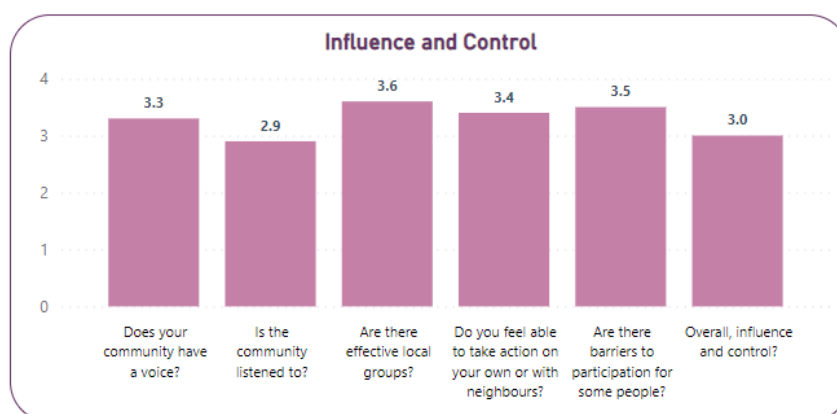
Three questions were asked about different aspects of social interaction with a final question which asked "Overall, considering your responses to the questions above, how would you rate the range of opportunities which allow you to meet and spend time with other people?" The scores were similar for each of these questions with 'would people come together in a crisis?' scoring highest at 4.0, while the score for 'overall, how would you rate opportunities for social interaction?' was lowest at 3.7.





**Identity and belonging:** These questions asked about feelings of identity and belonging (does your neighbourhood have a positive identity that supports a strong sense of belonging) and again participants were asked to give a score from 1-7. The highest scoring item was 'how welcoming are people in this place?' which scored 4.3, and the lowest scoring was 'how involved are people in the community?' which scored 3.6. The score for 'overall, to what extent does your neighbourhood have a positive identity that supports a strong sense of belonging?' was 4.0.

**Influence and sense of control:** These questions related to how well your community feels listened to and included in decision-making. The lowest score here was for the question 'is the community listened to?' which scored 2.9 with the highest score being for 'are there effective local groups?' which scored 3.6. The score for 'overall, when things happen in your neighbourhood, how well do you feel listened to and included in decision-making?' was 3.0.



### Community Planning Aberdeen Response - this is what we are doing:

Our first line of questioning was about where people get together and find out what is happening. Your answers to these questions are important as they tell us where to go and how best to connect with communities. Community Planning Aberdeen and individual partner organisations are always seeking more effective and intuitive ways of reaching our communities. This information will be shared with staff across Community Planning Aberdeen to inform how we connect with communities. We will also think about how we can use these spaces, community networks and social media to inform and engage members of the public in the refresh of the Aberdeen City [Local Outcome Improvement Plan](#) and [Locality Plans](#) by April 2024. Through our community empowerment improvement projects we aim to encourage more people and community groups to get involved in their community to make improvements in their neighbourhood and so we will also share this feedback with our community empowerment project teams so as to inspire new ways of working.

Our next line of questioning was about how connected to their community people currently feel. We learned that on a scale of 1-7 people scored 3.7 for overall opportunities for social interaction but scored more positively (higher) when breaking down their answers. For example, people scored 4 for coming together in a crisis and 3.9 for opportunities that everyone can join and mix. People scored 4 overall for sense of identity and belonging. When breaking down their answer, people scored 3.6 for how involved people are in the community and scored 4.3 for how welcoming people are in this place.

These answers give us some confidence that in the main, communities do have the right conditions for community empowerment where people have the opportunity to meet and take part in their local community. However, more detailed analysis of the data shows that this is not the case for people across all communities. Feeling isolated can be damaging to our health and wellbeing and a person's sense of identity and belonging can affect how they interact with their local community. Our Locality Planning Team is reaching out to people to encourage all individuals who have the available time, resources and capacity to be active in their community and help make a difference in their area through helping develop and deliver their Locality Plan. The sub analysis has been shared with the Locality Planning Team to help them take a more targeted approach to supporting neighbourhoods which do not have many opportunities for social interaction and/or a strong sense of identity and belonging. The results will also be shared with members of our Locality Empowerment Groups and Priority Neighbourhood Partnership for consideration when developing the refreshed Locality Plans.

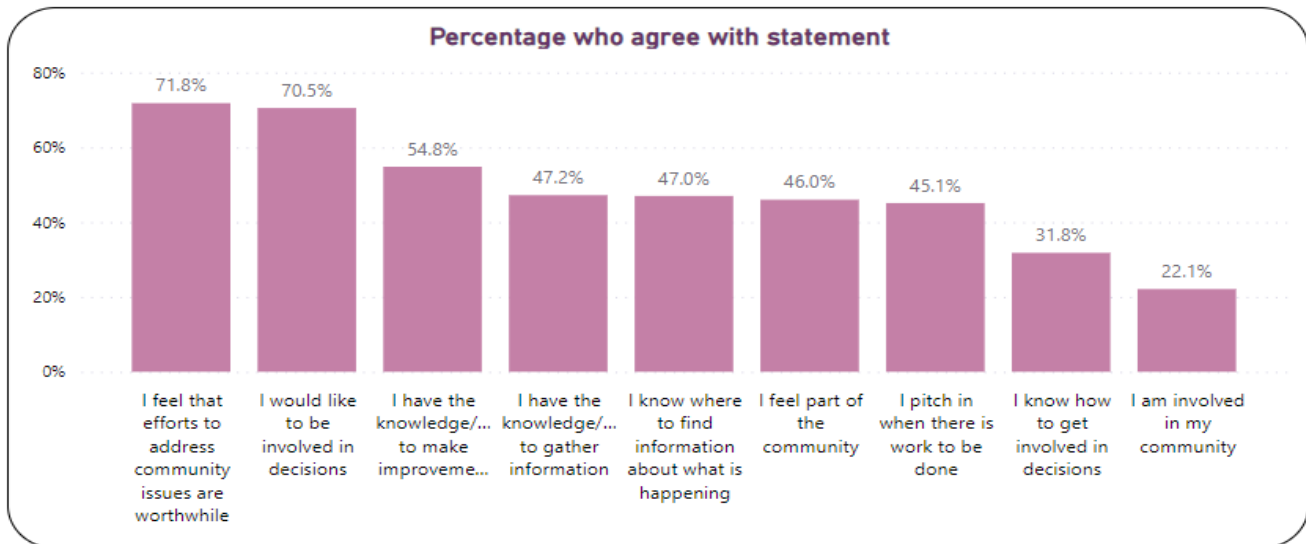
Ultimately, we believe community empowerment is when people have a voice and ability to influence what happens to them and their community. Therefore the success of our Community Empowerment Strategy is measured by the answers to the questions we ask the panel about influence and sense of control. The overall score for influence and sense of control was 3 out of 7, with 16.7% of people scoring 5 and above. This is significantly lower than when we last asked this question in 2021 (24%) and in 2020 (27%). When breaking down the answers, the lowest score was 2.9 for the community feeling listened to, which gives us some indication for the reason for the low score overall, but it is imperative that we explore the reasons more fully with communities. Panel members will be invited to join a focus group to explore their views about this topic and what we can do to address the barriers to people's feelings of influence and sense of control.

In the meantime, acting on the feedback from this survey that communities do not feel listened to, we will ensure that we report back to communities how we are using their feedback to make improvements. This service response demonstrates the commitment of the Community Empowerment Group to model best practice behaviours and engage in honest dialogue with our people and communities. We expect the service responses for future questionnaires to be similarly detailed and indeed this is an expectation we introduced as part of the City Voice Review we carried out last year.

There are several engagement exercises being planned over the course of the next year as part of the refresh of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Locality Plans. We will ensure that we report back to communities on the outcome of these engagements and how their feedback has informed these new plans.

## Involvement in Community Groups/Activities

In this section of the questionnaire, panellists were asked to rate their agreement with a range of statements relating to involvement in community groups or activities. Agreement was highest for the statements 'I feel that efforts to address community issues are worthwhile' (71.8% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement) and 'I would like to be involved in decisions which affect my community' (70.5%). Agreement was lowest for 'I am involved in my community' (22.1%) and 'I know how to get involved in decisions which affect my community' (31.8%). The statements which had the highest proportion of respondents selecting 'neither agree nor disagree' were 'I feel part of the community in the area where I live' (34.4%), 'I am involved in my community' (34.3%) and 'I pitch in when there is work to be done' (34.2%).



Almost a quarter of respondents (24.5%) reported that they belonged to a community group. 90 respondents gave the names of the groups they were involved in, with 74.5% of these agreeing to be contacted to find out more about the groups. Most of those who belonged to a community group agreed that they knew where to find information about support or training available either to themselves (59.8%) or to their group (60.9%) and where to find information about connecting with other (similar) groups (53.2%). A smaller proportion agreed that they knew where to find information about funding available to their group (40.2%). Only 25% agreed with the statement that they did not feel they needed any additional support.

### Community Planning Aberdeen Response - this is what we are doing:

We are extremely fortunate in Aberdeen to have so many community groups making a vital contribution to the City's people, place and economy. By volunteering, people can make a valuable contribution to the community while learning new skills and improving their health and well-being. Community groups are led by local people and rely on volunteers giving up their time and sharing their knowledge and skills. By volunteering, people can make a valuable contribution to the community while learning new skills and improving their health and well-being. Community empowerment cannot exist without community involvement. This line of questioning was to understand people's levels of motivation to get involved in their community and to increase our awareness of the community groups operating in Aberdeen.

Although a high proportion of people answered that they felt that efforts to address community issues are worthwhile and that they would like to be involved in decisions which affect their community; levels were much lower for people who are currently involved in their community and know how to get involved in decisions which affect their community.

However we are delighted through this survey to learn that 24.5% of panellists are involved in a community group and grateful to the 90 respondents who shared the name of their group so that we can find out more about them. We also note the idea put forward by one panel member to create a 'life in your community' website to help share information about the 'many groups doing wonderful work in the community'. We will consider this as part of our community capacity building project mentioned below.

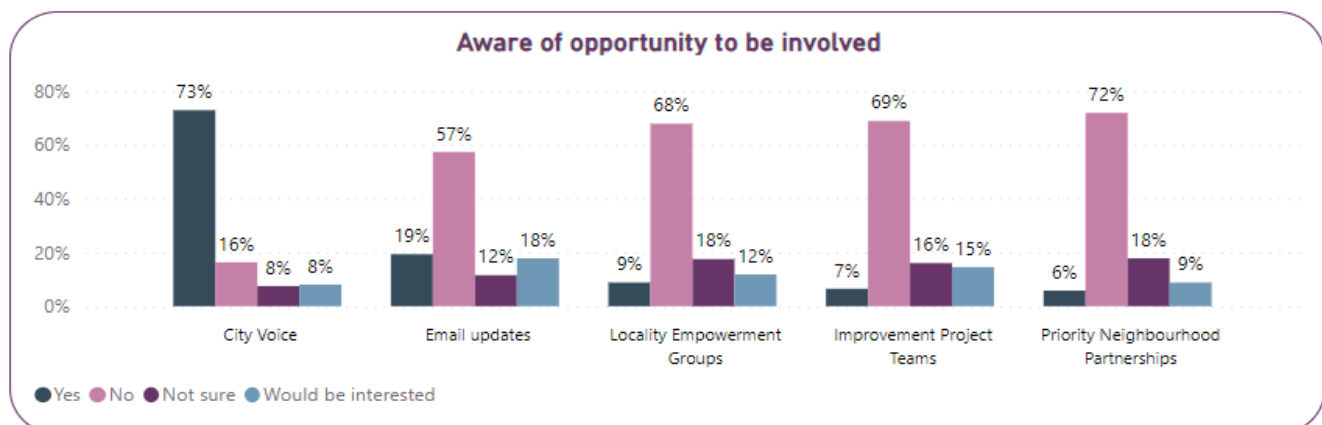
We know already that one of the barriers to people getting involved in the community is that they don't know how to or they lack the skills and confidence to work with others in a community setting. This was identified as an area for improvement in our Community Empowerment Strategy and we have a project already underway to create tools and resources for communities and staff to build their capacity to take forward improvement in and with the community. We are engaging communities in the development of the toolkit and in June invited people to participate in a workshop to explore this as part of our Community Gathering. In the meantime, we will continue to engage with staff and communities as part of our capacity building improvement project and would welcome panel members involvement in this process.

## Working with Community Planning Aberdeen

### Aware of Community Planning

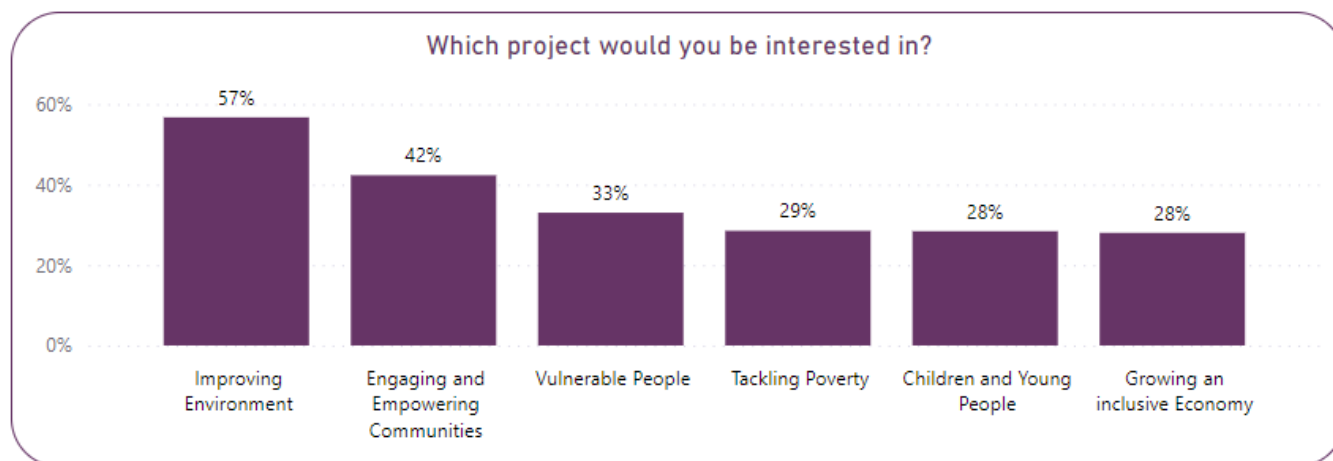
In this section of the questionnaire, panellists were asked questions relating to their awareness and understanding of Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA). When asked, most respondents (56.1%) said they had not been aware of CPA before joining the City Voice Panel.

Panellists were then asked if they were aware of the opportunity to get involved through a number of different ways (City Voice Panel, Locality Empowerment Groups, Priority Neighbourhood Partnerships, Improvement Project Teams and signing up for community emails). There was also an option to indicate interest in being involved. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the highest awareness was for the City Voice panel with 72.8% of respondents saying they were aware of the opportunity to get involved. For all other choices, most respondents said they were not aware of the opportunity to get involved. The highest levels of interest for being involved were for signing up for community email updates (17.8%) and Improvement Project Teams (14.5%).





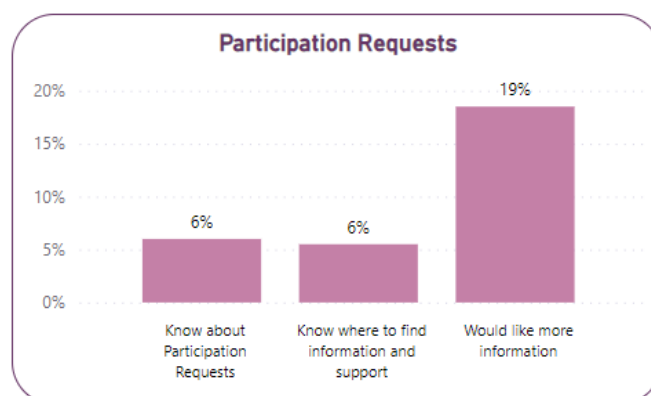
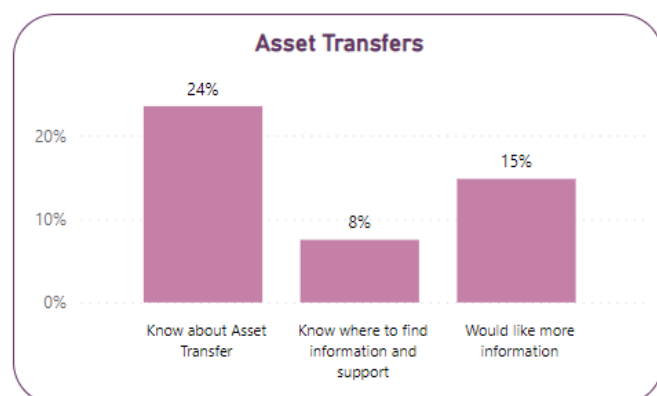
The next question asked participants who had indicated an interest in being involved in an Improvement Project, what project might they be interested in. Highest levels of interest were for Improvement Projects around Improving the Environment (56.7%) and Engaging and Empowering Communities (42.3%). A third of respondents (33%) indicated they might be interested in an Improvement Project around Supporting Vulnerable People, with over a quarter expressing interest in the three other projects (Tackling Poverty, Growing an inclusive Economy and Nurturing Children and Young People).



## Asset Transfers and Participation Requests

Asset Transfers introduce a right for community bodies to make requests to all local authorities, Scottish Ministers and a range of public bodies for any land or building they feel they could make better use of. Participants were firstly asked if they were aware of Asset Transfer. Less than a quarter (23.5%) of respondents said they were aware of Asset Transfer. When asked if they knew where to find information and support about making an Asset Transfer request, only 7.5% said 'yes', with 14.8% saying they would like more information about Asset Transfer.

Participation Requests are a new means by which community groups can request to have a greater involvement in, and influence over, decisions and services that affect their communities and community lives. When asked if they were aware of Participation Requests, only 6% of respondents said 'yes'. When asked if they knew where to find information and support about making a Participation Request, 5.5% said 'yes' with 18.5% saying they would like more information about Participation Requests.

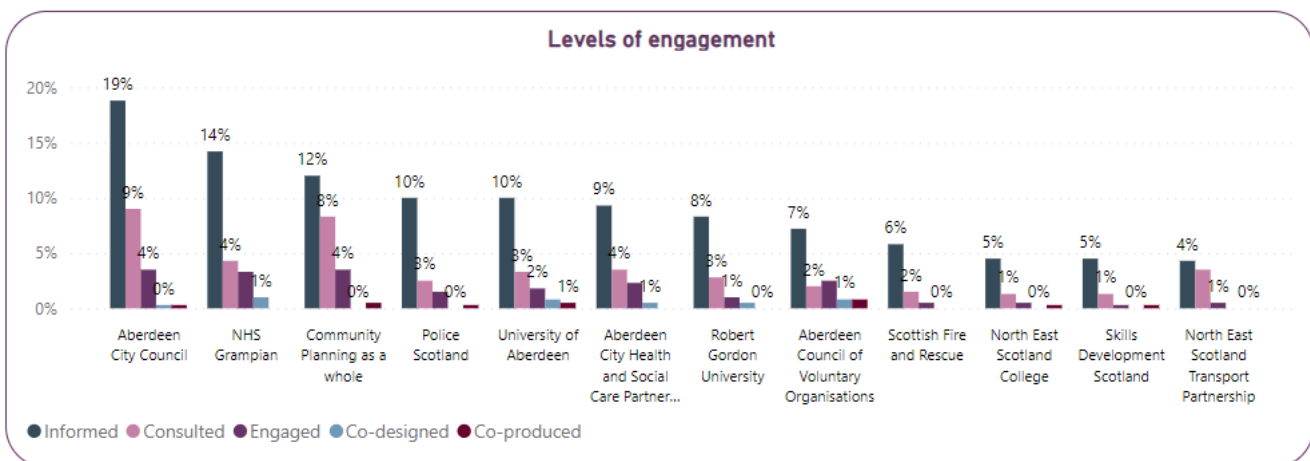


## Engagement with Community Planning Aberdeen and Partners

This set of questions aimed to find out what, if any, experience panellists may have had of engaging with Community Planning Aberdeen as a whole and with individual Partner organisations (identified in the chart below). Each organisation was listed and respondents were asked to indicate their level of engagement. Levels of engagement were:

- None
- Informed (e.g. told what was happening)
- Consulted (e.g. had the opportunity to give feedback)
- Engaged (e.g. had regular opportunities to express your views and influence decisions)
- Co-designed (e.g. involved in decisions and designing solutions)
- Co-produced (e.g. where everybody worked together as equals to come to a solution)
- Don't know/not sure

On the whole, levels of engagement were low. The most common response for CPA as a whole and all individual Partner organisations was **None**, with over half of all respondents choosing this for all of the organisations. Percentages ranged from 51% for Aberdeen City Council to 76% for Grampian Regional Equality Council. In terms of actual levels of engagement the most commonly chosen for all Partner Organisations was **Informed**, followed by **Consulted**. Levels for **Engaged** were low for all Partner Organisation with very few participants indicating being involved in either **Co-designing** or **Co-producing**.



Note. GREC is a small third sector partner. Its scope for engagement is much narrower than our core community planning partners and therefore has not been included in the chart above.

Participants were then asked what changes they thought would help improve community engagement in the City. Up to three suggestions could be given and a total of 395 suggestions were received. These have been passed to the Community Engagement Group for full consideration. A small sample is given below:

- *Make it easy. Displays in the community.*
- *LISTEN! Ensure anyone attending is sure of why they are there and that they feel valued. Make sure any actions or discussions are followed up. Too many civic events take place and attendees hear nothing afterwards.*
- *Closer integration of community centres in their communities. There's a bunch near me but I don't know what's going on at them. They could be supported to make better use of social media, schools and church networks etc. If you can get folk back to community centre's then you can get them engaging in their communities.*
- *Give more power to local communities to make decisions to improve their local areas.*

- *Perhaps door to door questionnaire so people can give their views.*
- *Workplaces could be an avenue to give information.*
- *Use of social media as a means to communicate? Also posters in libraries, coffee shops, GP surgeries for the elderly and schools, community centres for the young*
- *People tend to just get on with their lives, and family and friends tend to come first. A regular bulletin circulated by mail, email etc just giving a summary of what the various organizations are, and how they interact might be helpful.*
- *Give people for information about projects and how they would benefit the community*
- *People chapping doors - more face to face engagement*
- *Involve people who do not bring their own agendas to the forum, and keep politics out of the equation.*
- *Creating a one stop informing point for people who want to get involved and be a part of their community, but don't know how. Either as an up to date webpage or a physical place or a combination.*

## Focus Groups

We are planning on developing resources and information to help people get involved in their communities. The final question asked participants if they would be interested in taking part in a focus group to share their ideas. 160 (40%) of respondents said they would be interested in taking part.

### Community Planning Aberdeen Response - this is what we are doing:

We wanted to gauge how aware people and communities are of Community Planning Aberdeen and their experiences of being engaged by the Partnership overall and individual partner organisations. This is the first time we have asked this question and so the answers provide us with an important baseline of where we currently are on Community Planning Aberdeen's [ladder of empowerment](#).

Only 28.7% of respondents said that they had been aware of Community Planning Aberdeen before joining the panel. 23.4% said they were aware of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan but only 18.2% were aware of Locality Plans. Lower still, 13.9% were aware of the Community Empowerment Strategy. 16.8% were aware of our improvement projects. Whilst these results may seem low, we believe them to be fair. We recognise that people may connect with community planning primarily through their involvement and engagement with a partner organisation or community group and may not recognise this as working with Community Planning Aberdeen. For example, young people engaging with Police Scotland as part of Community Planning Aberdeen's project to reduce anti-social behaviour. A family accessing affordable food through one of our community pantries as part of Community Planning Aberdeen's food poverty project. A community member joining a Locality Empowerment Group as part of our integrated locality planning model with the Health and Social Care Partnership. We celebrate and exploit the power of our member organisations to reach and engage more people, groups and organisations in our shared improvement activity. We also recognise that the formal community planning structures are not right for everyone and part of our ambition is to align more closely with the work that is organically taking place in communities.



We will continue to increase awareness of Community Planning Aberdeen and promote the benefits of working together, at the same time as ensuring that our scarce resources are channelled to where they are needed most – improving outcomes for all our people. The information specific to individual partner organisations will be shared with them for their own particular consideration and action.

Thank you City Voice panel members for your thoughtful and considered responses to our questions. We really do appreciate your feedback, suggestions and ideas for improvement. If you are interested in getting involved in working with Community Planning Aberdeen, please contact us by emailing [communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk).

Best wishes from the Community Empowerment Group.

## And finally.....

This newsletter, together with the detailed report of the 47<sup>th</sup> questionnaire, is available to view on the Community Planning website [City Voice - Community Planning Aberdeen](#).

If you have any further queries or would like to feedback your comments, please contact:

City Voice Co-ordinator

Email: [cityvoice@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:cityvoice@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

## Useful web addresses:

City Voice: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/city-voice/>

Community Planning Aberdeen: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/>

Opportunities for communities to get involved in our work:  
<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/ourcommunities/>

Join the Community Empowerment Network: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-empowerment-network/>

Sign up for receiving more information through community update emails:  
<https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/community-updates/>

Community Empowerment Strategy: <https://communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Final-Community-Empowerment-Strategy-Nov-2022.pdf>