COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

2023-2026

30 November 22

Community Planning
Aberdeen

Engagement Approved
Grampian Engagement Network

Contents

1. Introduction

This Community Empowerment Strategy presents an exciting opportunity for Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA), it's partners and all people in Aberdeen. It provides a framework to guide how we work together in innovative ways for the benefits of our communities through engagement, participation and empowerment.

We recognise the crucial role that a focused and effective approach to community engagement and empowerment has on tackling inequalities and improving outcomes for everyone in our city. We know that until communities are at the heart of decision-making, we will not be getting it right for everyone.

The Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) sets out our vision for Aberdeen City as 'a place where all people can prosper', regardless of their background or circumstances. This means all people being able to access the opportunities available in our city to do well, succeed and flourish.

To achieve this vision and be a successful, thriving City, we need an active and inclusive citizenship in Aberdeen, where people have a voice and ability to influence what happens to them and their community.

> **'Our ambition is for all communities across Aberdeen to be equal community planning partners'**.
>
> Community Empowerment Group

We must consider the barriers that prevent people getting involved and having influence and ensure that they are addressed, particularly for those less likely to get involved because of them.

Our ambition extends to being a democratic City, with Aberdeen leading the way to actively empower its citizens to have influence over their lives and outcomes. This document sets out how Community Planning Aberdeen will improve how it works together with all people and communities to achieve this.

How this document is set out and who it is for

This document introduces some guiding principles for how Community Planning Aberdeen, its individual partners and communities can work together utilising both organisational and community expertise to identify and achieve shared goals and priorities. It sets out where we are now in terms of how we currently seek to engage and empower communities through the forums and arrangements we have put in place. Finally, we set out aims for improvement to be achieved by the end of this four year plan.

Section 8 of this document introduces a new Community Tools and Resources section of our website. We want these tools and resources to remain a "live" aspect of our strategy and delivery. This document should therefore be read in conjunction with the webpage. We aim for the tools and resources page to offer guidance, support and empower all professionals, community groups and community members keen to be involved.
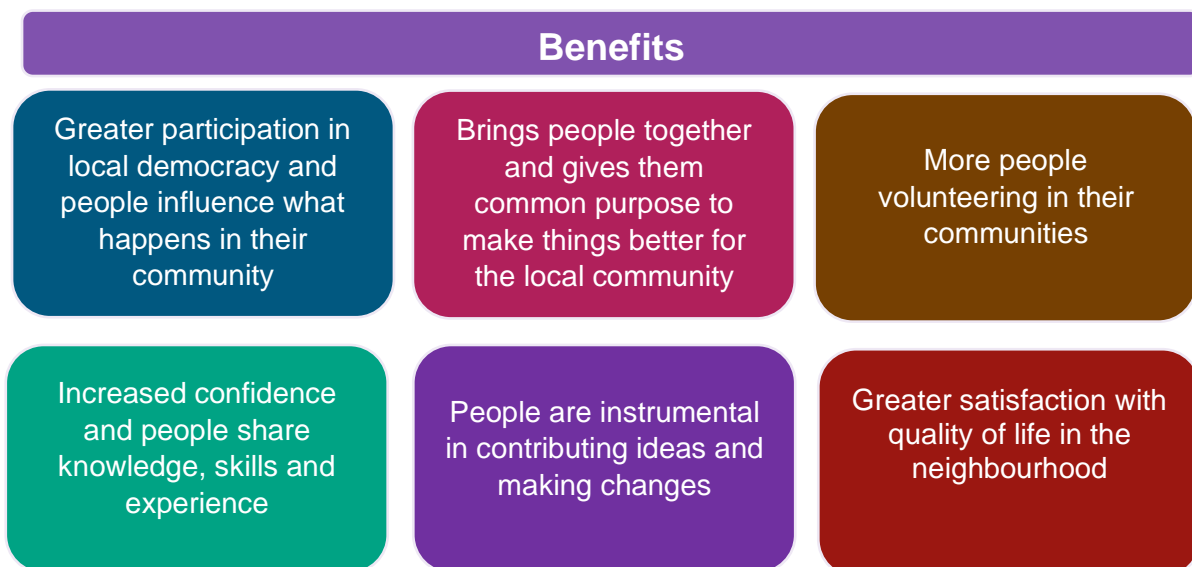
2. What is Community Empowerment?

There is no one standard definition of community empowerment. The World Health Organisation describes it as the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. The Scottish Government states it is a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them. Communities may be geographically located, or they may share common interests concerns or identities.

Regardless of how community empowerment is defined, there is a common belief that the current way of planning and delivering public services is too top down, with not enough control and power sitting with communities. Increasing community empowerment is a national priority for Scottish Government and for Community Planning Aberdeen.

Why is it important?

Community empowerment places a focus on enabling and building strong personal and community resilience, where people have as much control over their lives as possible. It creates the conditions for individuals to come together and work together as a local community to influence and action improvements to their local environment. This benefits the individual and the community because it creates strong social relationships and builds collective power.

Benefits		
Greater participation in local democracy and people influence what happens in their community	Brings people together and gives them common purpose to make things better for the local community	More people volunteering in their communities
Increased confidence and people share knowledge, skills and experience	People are instrumental in contributing ideas and making changes	Greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood

Power and Inequalities

The COVID-19 pandemic, and recent social movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter, have shone a light on the power inequalities that influence how society works. Historically, some groups have faced discrimination and disadvantage, and this continues to have an impact today. Groups who have faced discrimination and disadvantage, historically and/or on an on-going basis, are less likely to benefit from a "level-playing field" approach (where all individuals, groups and communities are treated equally). This could be because certain groups are:

- more likely to have less time to take up engagement opportunities (e.g. due to having to work longer hours or shift work and being more likely to have caring responsibilities.
- more likely to face practical barriers around awareness and understanding of Community Planning and partner processes (e.g. relating to language barriers, inter-cultural communication issues, or accessibility).
- part of groups that have historically faced prejudice and discrimination, and are therefore groups with "protected characteristics", as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- more likely to be living in inadequate quality housing conditions, struggling to pay for food, heating and fuel and therefore have things they must prioritise over and above community engagement and empowerment activity.
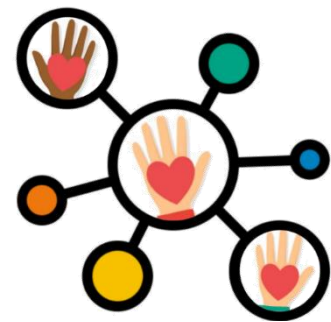
A genuine attempt at community empowerment must then consider and address these inequalities in its strategy and approach. We therefore must understand the inequalities experienced by our communities and shape our engagement and empowerment approach in a way that actively involves communities to address them.

We want to encourage all individuals who have available time, resources and capacity to be active in their community, but if we want a truly democratic and fair society, investment of resources and energies will be required to help address the barriers.

Considering inequality and power, we also need to be aware of the risks of taking a coercive approach to community engagement. Approaches where communities feel forced to comply can only be justified in the most extreme circumstances, e.g. a recent example being restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond these extreme circumstances, we must ensure that the conditions created for engagement/empowerment offers the freedom for communities to choose to engage, and ideally create the culture, environment and power and resource distribution that allow communities to thrive and determine what they want for themselves.

3. Guiding Principles and Standards

Guiding Principles

Community Planning Aberdeen (CPA) follows the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 guidance and regulations for Community Planning Partnerships. These include:

1 CPA and community planning partners work with community bodies to ensure that all bodies which can contribute to community planning are able to do so in an effective way and to the extent that they wish to do so.

2 CPA and community planning partners have a clear understanding of distinctive needs and aspirations of communities of place and interest within its area, as a result of effective participation with community bodies.

3 Effective community participation informs decisions about CPA's priorities, how partner services are shaped and resources deployed; this includes working with community bodies on co-production where these bodies wish to do so.

4 Effective community participation informs how CPA manages and scrutinises performance and progress, and how it revises its actions to meet its ambitions as a result of its performance management.

5 CPA embraces the principles of effective co-production which is aimed at combining the mutual strengths and capacities of all partners (including community bodies) to achieve positive change.

Grampian Engagement Standards

The Grampian Engagement Network has identified 10 standards for good quality engagement through their Charter for Community Engagement which supports organisations to put the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act into practice. They are based on best practice guidance from the National Standards of Community Engagement, Scottish Approach to Service Design, Quality Improvement and Planning with People.

- Planning
- Identifying and appreciating resources
- Being inclusive
- Fostering ownership
- Building on previous engagements
- Being aspirational
- Working and learning together
- Building trust and relationships
- Making engagement a worthwhile experience for participants
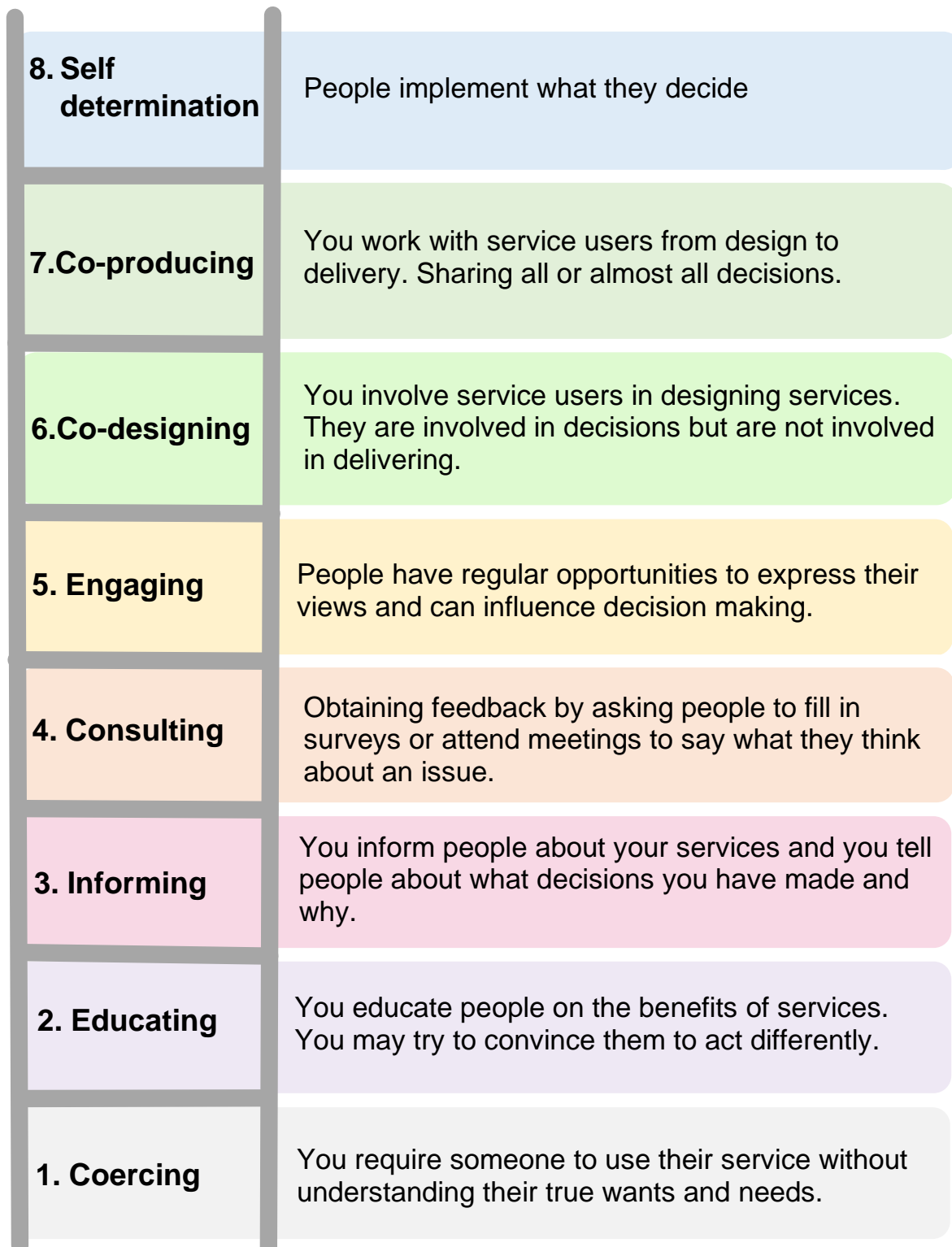- Closing the loop

Find out more by clicking here.

The Ladder of Empowerment

The metaphor of a ladder is used to represent the interactions between Community Planning partners and all people. The top rung of the ladder represents self-determination, where activities and decisions are made independently by people in their communities. The further down the ladder, the less influence the community has over decisions.

Whilst the aim of this strategy is to climb the ladder, it is important to recognise that **all rungs can be appropriate** depending on the context. The ladder rungs represent levels of engagement, not steps.

8. Self determination	People implement what they decide
7.Co-producing	You work with service users from design to delivery. Sharing all or almost all decisions.
6.Co-designing	You involve service users in designing services. They are involved in decisions but are not involved in delivering.
5. Engaging	People have regular opportunities to express their views and can influence decision making.
4. Consulting	Obtaining feedback by asking people to fill in surveys or attend meetings to say what they think about an issue.
3. Informing	You inform people about your services and you tell people about what decisions you have made and why.
2. Educating	You educate people on the benefits of services. You may try to convince them to act differently.
1. Coercing	You require someone to use their service without understanding their true wants and needs.

4. Where We Are Now

Community Planning Aberdeen values community involvement and is committed to increasing levels of community involvement in community planning. We have mechanisms for communities to participate in the work of the Community Planning Partnership in a range of ways and to differing levels of influence.

Whilst individual partners determine the level and style of engagement required to achieve their own engagement goals, some shared arrangements are in place for working together with communities for mutual benefit.

These are set out below and aim to provide meaningful opportunities for all people to share their thoughts and ideas, influence decisions and get involved in taking forward activities which lead to improvements.

8. SELF DETERMINATION

Community Learning and Development Partners provide services which are building the capacity of people to make and lead change in their lives for the better. Communities are supported to make social connections with other people and groups to work together to achieve shared goals.

7. CO-PRODUCING

Community Connector is a role we introduced last year to enable greater participation of individuals and community groups in our multi-agency improvement projects. Community members are encouraged to join our project teams to help design and deliver changes being tested in their neighbourhood.

6. CO-DESIGNING

Locality Empowerment Groups (LEGs) have been set up to bring together local people interested in improving the quality of life for people living in their community and across Aberdeen. Members use their own knowledge and experiences to influence priorities and help determine solutions.

Priority Neighbourhood Partnerships have been set up to support collaboration with people living in the most deprived areas of the city according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Community members are involved in preparing Locality Plans which set out priorities for improvement for people living in the area.

5.ENGAGING

Participatory Budgeting is a process which enables people to have a direct say in how a public budget can be used to address community priorities. Participatory Budgeting is used for the Fairer Aberdeen Fund and has also been used for other pots of funding by Community Planning Aberdeen.

Fairer Aberdeen Board oversees allocation of the Fairer Aberdeen Fund. It includes partner organisations and 7 community representatives from priority neighbourhoods contributing their knowledge and lived experience. They ensure that the community voice is heard in decisions and are involved in monitoring and evaluating the programme.

Community Empowerment Network is a forum for community groups and organisations working across the city to connect with each other and with members of Community Planning Aberdeen to stay informed and identify further opportunities for public services, third sector and community groups to work together.

Aberdeen Youth Network provides an opportunity for people who work with children and young people across the city to come together and connect. It helps improve communication between services, supports a more co-ordinated and joined-up approach to planning services, and promotes sharing good practice and what funding and training opportunities are available. This ensures there is an effective youth governance structure in place for the city.

4.CONSULTING

City Voice is a panel of Aberdeen residents who have agreed to give their views on a range of issues. Panellists complete at least two questionnaire surveys per year. The results of the surveys help us understand whether we are improving outcomes for people across the city.

Simulator is an online tool used to gauge the attitude, priorities and values of citizens and communities across Aberdeen. It was used to engage communities in the refresh of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan by allowing participants to rank projects relation to importance to them.

3.INFORMING

Communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk is where members of the public can find information about the work of Community Planning Aberdeen. This includes details of partners, improvement projects, data and how to get involved.

Community Updates such as bulletins. newsletters and email distribution to keep community members up to date with latest news.

Social Media Platforms including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube allow us to communicate with many people. Through social media we can share blogs, photos, videos, and web content. We can also have conversations with our users.

Our collective understanding and appreciation for the role that communities must play in improving outcomes for Aberdeen has come a long way in the past few years. Our increased efforts to engage all people and community groups have led to productive relationships. We can demonstrate practice up and down the ladder of empowerment, both as individual partners and as a Community Planning Partnership.

Groups such as the Community Empowerment Network and Locality Empowerment Groups have sought to bring disparate community groups and networks together to galvanise efforts on shared priorities. Community Learning and Development partners continue to build the capacity of the community to take charge of their outcomes and make a positive impact. Social media and tools such as the simulator are helping us reach out wider into the community.

Our ambition is for all communities to become equal community planning partners.

An ongoing review of the internal and external factors that can impact community empowerment will be essential to the delivery of this strategy as we adapt our approach accordingly.

STRENGTHS

- Active citizens and community groups
- Commitment of partners to empower communities
- Strong leadership and willingness to change
- Ambition of the LOIP to be a child friendly city by 2026

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of data and measurement of community empowerment
- Representativeness of those engaged
- Low engagement with LOIP and Locality Planning opportunities for community involvement
- Lack of specific training for staff and communities on making a shift in relation to community empowerment
- Challenges to communicate involvement opportunities with all communities
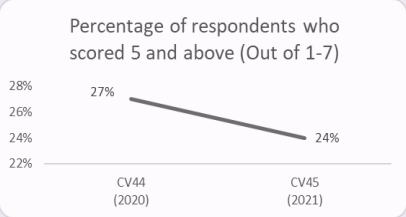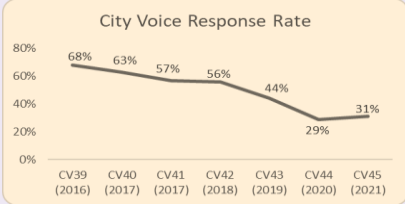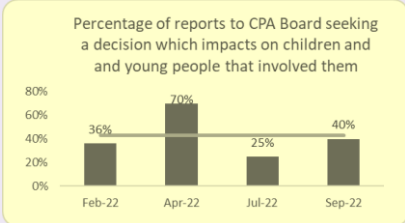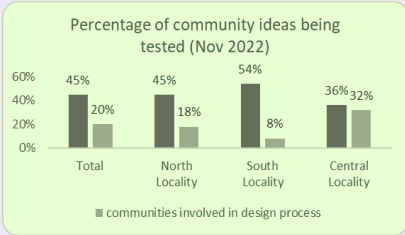
OPPORTUNITIES

- Digital technology
- Social renewal post pandemic and more people volunteering
- Local community leadership
- Activist culture and social capital
- Positive experiences of participation
- Focus on the benefits and what can be achieved by working together
- Increased confidence and skills among local people
- The motivating factor of potential greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood
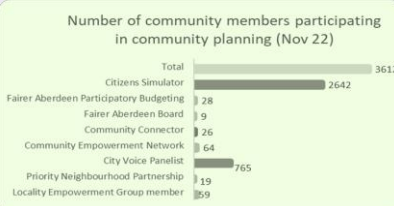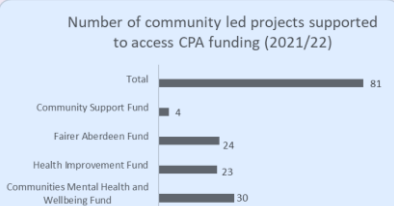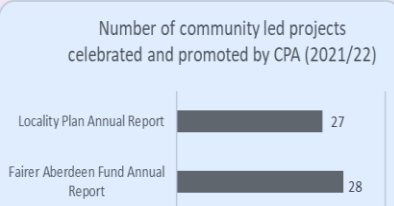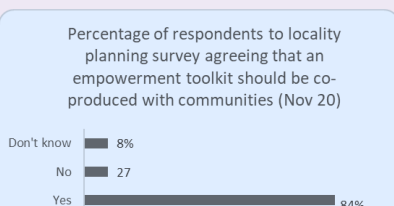
THREATS

- Loss of momentum due to the pandemic
- Overuse of digital engagement
- Over-engagement with the same communities
- Limited resources and capacity
- Negative perceptions and lack of trust in working with public services
- Lack of confidence and perceived lack of skills
- Previous experiences of poorly executed participation approaches

5. Where We Want to Be

The Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2016-2026 sets out 15 Stretch Outcomes which break down Community Planning Aberdeen's 2026 vision for the City as 'a place where all people can prosper' into high level, priority improvement aims. This Community Empowerment Strategy identifies a 16th stretch outcome which defines what improvement in community empowerment would look like by 2026 to contribute to the overall vision. Our improvement projects will test change ideas gathered from stakeholders and communities to achieve this.

| Stretch Outcome 16	Primary Driver	Improvement Project Aim	Baseline	Rung on Ladder of Empowerment	Lead Partner
100% increase in the proportion of citizens who feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026 *(Baseline 2021: 24% Source: Aberdeen City Voice Place standard question)*	16.1 Conditions for collaboration enable delivery of shared objectives and a focus on action rather than hierarchy	Increase the rate and representativeness of the response to Aberdeen City Voice to 63% by 2024.		**4. CONSULTING**	Aberdeen City Council/ Grampian Regional Equality Council
		100% of decisions which impact on children and young people are informed by them by 2026 (LOIP Stretch Outcome 8).		**5. ENGAGING**	Aberdeen City Council/ Police Scotland/ NHS Grampian
		Increase no. of community ideas identified within locality plans being tested by CPA and partners where communities are involved in the design process to at least 50% by 2024.		**6. CO-DESIGNING**	Aberdeen City Council

Stretch Outcome 16	Primary Driver	Improvement Project Aim	Baseline	Rung on Ladder of Empowerment	Lead Partner
		Increase no. and diversity of community members participating in community planning at a meaningful level (Rung 5 and above) by 100% by 2024.	Number of community members participating in community planning (Nov 22)	**7. CO-PRODUCING**	Aberdeen City Council / Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership
	16.2 Social connections and networks working together is supported and encouraged.	70% of community led organisations feeling supported by partners to access funding for community led initiatives by 2025.	Number of community led projects supported to access CPA funding (2021/22)	**8. SELF-DETERMINATION**	Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO)
		Increase awareness of community led projects across the City and help celebrate and promote at least 70% of known community led projects by 2024.	Number of community led projects celebrated and promoted by CPA (2021/22)	**8.SELF-DETERMINATION**	Station House Media Unit (SHMU)
	16.3 Capacity building to support people and communities to work together.	Increase the no. of people (staff and communities) who state that they have the skills, tools and support they need to work together to make improvements in the community to 50% by 2025.	Percentage of respondents to locality planning survey agreeing that an empowerment toolkit should be co-produced with communities (Nov 20)	**8.SELF-DETERMINATION**	NHS Grampian/ Grampian Engagement Network

6. Knowing We Are Getting There

We will take a programme management approach to the delivery of new Stretch Outcome 16 and underpinning improvement project aims. Using Quality Improvement (QI) methodology and tools, project teams will explore the effectiveness of current systems in empowering communities. Each project team will develop a project charter which sets out the aims of the project and the changes the team will test to achieve improvement. The project team will be responsible for gathering data to evidence whether their changes have resulted in improvement and reporting this monthly. This is line with the arrangements for the projects within the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

This information will also be used to update the online CPA Improvement Project Dashboard. A new section of the dashboard has been created for Stretch Outcome 16 and from here partners, staff and members of the public all have access to the latest update on progress and improvement data.

Stretch Outcome 16 - *100% increase in the proportion of citizens who feel able to participate in decisions that help change things for the better by 2026*
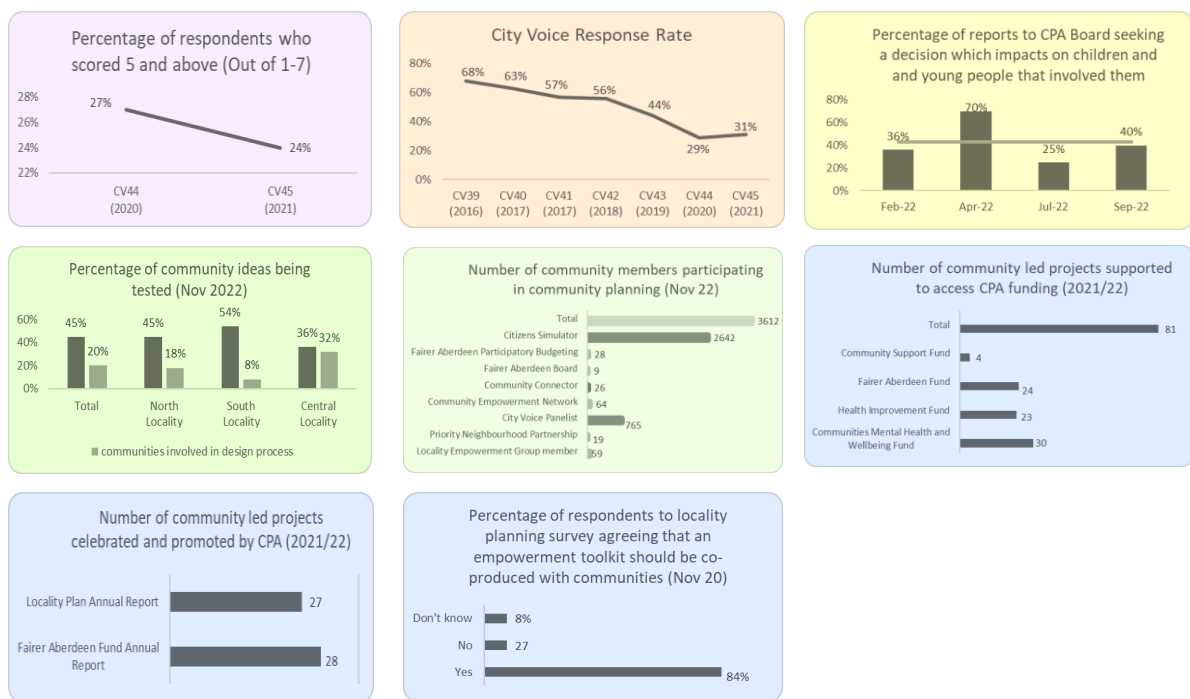
Outcomes Framework

As well as monitoring our improvement project data we will also monitor a set of key indicators to take a broader view of community empowerment across the city. These indicators will be included in a new section of the Aberdeen Outcomes Framework which is accessible through the Community Planning Aberdeen website. It is a tool that enables the Partnership to evaluate how well we are improving outcomes and identify any emerging issues we need to respond to which are not addressed by the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Community Empowerment Strategy.

Key Indicators to be included in the Outcomes Framework:

- Participants by method of engagement
- Percentage of known community groups we are engaging
- Representativeness/ diversity of communities involved in community planning improvement projects
- Number of people aware of Community Planning Aberdeen and how they can get involved in improvement projects
- Number of adults and young people taking part in influence and engagement activity through CLD
- Number of community groups receiving capacity building support through CLD activity
- Number/ capacity of physical spaces to support effective collaboration
- City voice response rate
- Number of participation requests
- Number of asset transfer requests
- Visits to CPA community resources website
- Social media likes and follows
- Community stories featured in local media

Annual Outcome Improvement Report

Community Planning Aberdeen produces an Annual Outcome Improvement Report which provides an overview of progress against the Local Outcome Improvement Plan and Community Empowerment Strategy.

7. Community Empowerment Group and Network

The Community Empowerment Group is responsible for leading the achievement of Stretch Outcome 16 on behalf of Community Planning Aberdeen through the improvement projects set out in section 5 of this strategy.

The group will work closely with the wider Community Empowerment Network to play a lead role in supporting the delivery of this strategy by promoting the use of the guiding principles and community tools and resources amongst partners and communities. It will also take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating progress (see Section 6), highlighting risks and issues to the CPA Management Group and CPA Board where the need for collective action beyond the Community Empowerment Group and Network is identified.
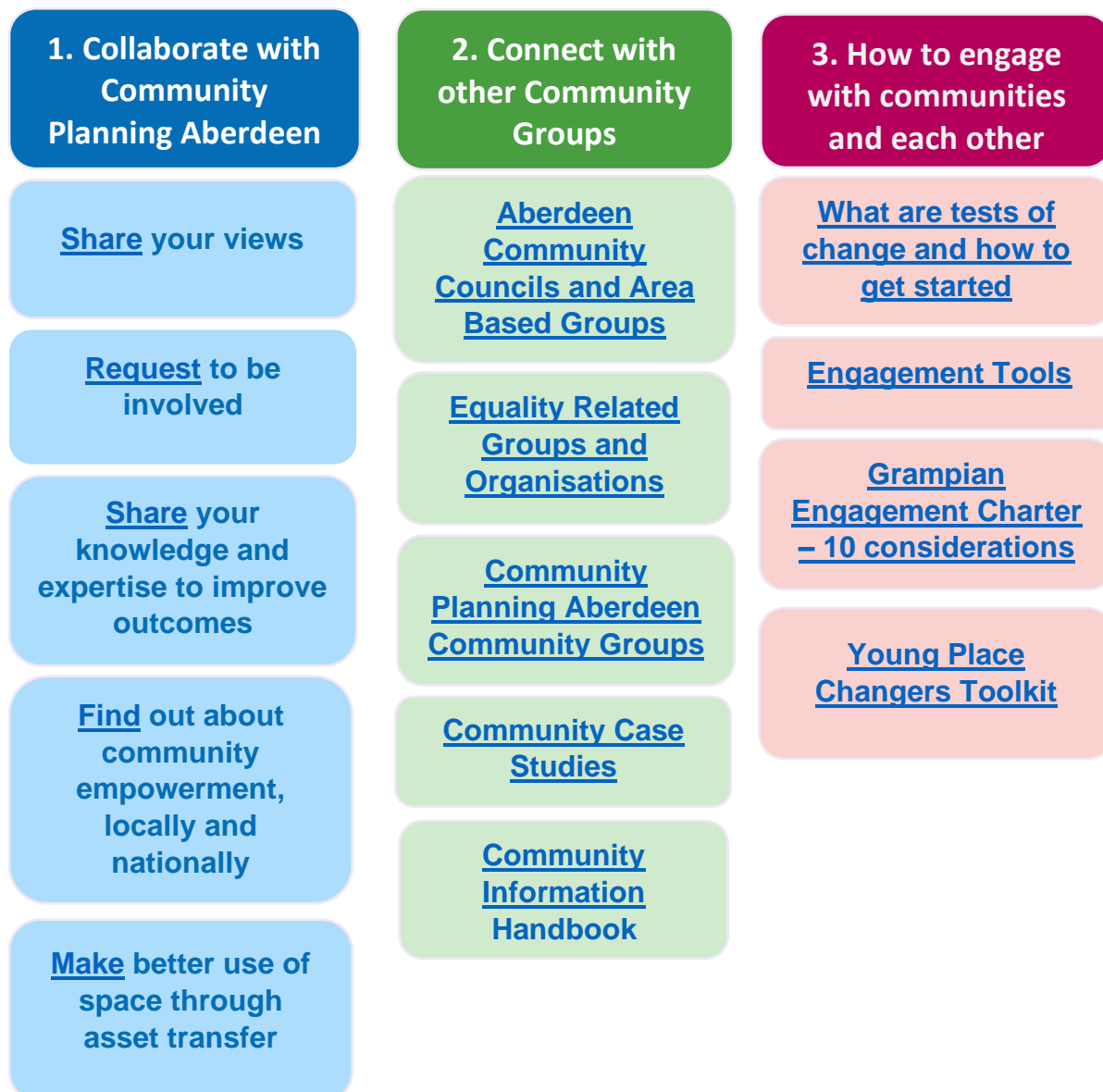
The Community Empowerment Group will work closely with the new Aberdeen Health Determinants Research Collaborative to ensure the Community Planning Partnership takes a research led approach to improvement, working with and involving communities in our research and improvement activity to delivery this strategy and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

8. Tools and Resources

This section of the strategy is a portal to our new tools and resources web page. From here people, communities and engagement practitioners will be able to access information about opportunities to work with Community Planning Aberdeen, other community groups operating in the area and a wide range of tools, resources and help guides on how to engage with the community. Whether you are an active citizen wishing to gain support for an idea, a community group seeking to make an improvement, or an organisation wishing to engage with the local community; this is a one stop shop for practical tips and advice.

1. Collaborate with Community Planning Aberdeen	2. Connect with other Community Groups	3. How to engage with communities and each other
Share your views	**Aberdeen Community Councils and Area Based Groups**	**What are tests of change and how to get started**
Request to be involved	**Equality Related Groups and Organisations**	**Engagement Tools**
Share your knowledge and expertise to improve outcomes	**Community Planning Aberdeen Community Groups**	**Grampian Engagement Charter – 10 considerations**
Find out about community empowerment, locally and nationally	**Community Case Studies**	**Young Place Changers Toolkit**
Make better use of space through asset transfer	**Community Information Handbook**	

The tools and resources pages will be constantly evolving, updated with the latest tools, tips, and practical advice as well as improvements made in response to user feedback.

9. Endorsements

This document is endorsed by the following partners.

10. Further information

If you have any questions about this strategy or would like to get involved in helping us take it forward then please contact us by emailing **communityplanning@aberdeencity.gov.uk**.

To find out more about Community Planning Aberdeen and the work of the Community Empowerment Group please visit **www.communityplanningaberdeen.org.uk/ceg/**