Democracy Matters - Phase 2
Feedback to SG from DM event on 3 February 2024

Questions addressed in our conversations

Q1.   How could your community use these powers to achieve what it wants, now and in the future?

- More say in the upkeep of Queen's Park, potentially even taking over management of the Park from GCC
- To ensure better street cleaning
- To ensure better parking enforcement
- To deal with empty retail units, promoting alternative use (e.g. pop-up shops, affordable housing)
- To tackle problems with fly-tipping
- To tackle problems with graffiti
- To ensure local organisations can have a voice without fear of having their funding cut
- To stop consultation being tick box exercises
- To enable more community ownership

Q 2a.   What other powers should be added?

- Community Councils to be a statutory consultee on planning matters
- Local planning should legally be required to have a level of sign off from the local community
- Third party right of appeal on planning decisions
- Power to appoint teams for specific tasks
- Power to Community to allow them to hold Executive officers to account through KPIs, bottom-up.
- Enhanced powers of local participatory budgeting and prioritising spending decisions
- Hypothecate 5% of Council Tax directly to local communities
- Community Councils to have power to raise 'tax', say up to 0.5% of rates income.
- Community Councils should have limited liability to allow greater activity.

Q3.   What are the best ways to make sure people in decision-making roles reflect their communities?

- By having local people making decisions
- Create an open forum (e.g. like surgeries)
- Ensure that at least 50% of any decision-making group are locally elected
- Making use of panels to reflect the diversity of the community (e.g. young people)
- Using online polls and voting systems

- Make it the responsibility of decision-making representatives to reach out (e.g. to young people)
- Adopt Community Forums which have elected positions that reflect different groups within the overall demographic of the local area (e.g. age, ethnic groups)
- Variety of methods of engagement targeted to some specific groups (e.g. BME)
- At the start, guidance to prioritise the most marginalised and seldom-heard voices
- Regular open surgeries with local councillors (in addition to one-to-one surgeries)
- Public sector employees must be free to offer open & honest advice and information to communities

Q 5b.   How could we encourage people to take part in decision-making?

- By giving real power to local communities, making outcomes clear and substantial
- Co-design, get creative with routes & platforms (e.g. Peoples' Assemblies)
- Route decision-making through Community Councils
- Each Community needs a space where the community can come in, meet, chat
- Use community meals to bring people together
- Provide some remuneration to give recognition of the importance of the role
- Ensure resources are available for peoples' time (e.g. food, transport, accessibility)
- Could Community Councils link up more to represent a larger area more powerfully
- Community Councils need to go to the people (e.g. meeting in libraries, Gurdwara)
- Identify individuals in a particular community (e.g. Arab community) as links into that community.
- Practical steps would include greater/better use of translations, easy read versions, outreach, local leaders going into community centres and hubs, making it relevant to peoples' day-to-day lives

Q6.   How can we make sure new decision-making organisations tell the community what they are doing and answer their questions?

- Use online bulletin board to pose questions that require answers
- Supporting virtual and actual notice boards - e.g. Community Facebook groups with significant followings
- Allocate more resources to feedback hubs (e.g. food shops, pubs & cafes)
- Use neighbourhood management committees
- Avoid multiple (unfair) voting if there's more than one avenue for this.
- No new decision-making bodies are required - instead enhance those that already exist, support Community Councils
- People Parliaments are good for the health of communities - being heard, listened to =being valued. But would need to be bold.

Q9.   What else could make sure the decision-making organisations are doing what the community want?

- Start with decision-making map - who makes decisions about what and how do the communicate?

- Communication and publicity - call them out if they don't
- Education in schools of political structures
- Themed engagement (e.g. bins, roads, schools)
- Ensuring communities have real power to influence (e.g. community closest to a development has most say in that decision).
- Dreaming, visioning, what is possible - examples from elsewhere?
- More community learning & development opportunities to help people define their needs
- Regular communication, clear routes for people to report issues.
- Regular events in the community for people to come together.
- Support and control of big voices, vested and private interests

Q14a. What types of support might communities need?

- More money
- Need help to understand costs
- Need help with training, upskilling (e.g. on leadership, partnership working, how to reach compromise, resolve conflict, participatory budgeting, fundraising, legal)
- Access to affordable support services (e.g. web design, translation, printing) that also support local businesses
- Learning from other countries' best practice
- Floating facilitators to assist communities that are less engaged.
- Council resources needed - including experience and knowledge (e.g. they advise on how to do something, for example, employing a street cleaner).
- Public education campaign on who does what
- Education on Political structures
- Resources to support peoples' engagement (e.g. childcare, travel etc.)
- A focus on doing something positive (e.g. a history project or citizens' science)

Q15. Are there other powers and resources that would help new decision-making organisations work with public sector partners?

- Improved, more navigable, websites
- Use of apps for reporting issues (e.g. fly tipping)

Q16. Please tell us about anything else you think is important.

- More community-based food growing
- More community-based energy
- What can be done without money? Look at different/more creative use of resources.
- Importance of the local environment (i.e. are we doing enough on green issues?)
- More public ownership (e.g. of transport, Council assets)
- Integrated public transport system
- Equal treatment for Communities and Developers on Planning matters.
- Peoples' Assemblies
- Final decisions should be made by local communities