

## **Craigmillar Learning for Community Participation and Action report: Chapter 10 – Local decision making and the wider context**

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A 'research group' of local people - to locate key issues and concerns

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Craigmillar Communiversity (see chapters 7 and 9)

The Estate of Bill Douglas (see chapter 7)

## **Chapter 10: Local decision making and the wider context.**

### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at local people's knowledge of decision making, both locally and in the wider world – the complex social, political and economic forces that impact on any community, but with particular power on a deprived community. The chapter covers in detail the following:

- the Community Council and its processes (pages 4-10)
- other local decision making including the Social Inclusion Partnership (pages 11-12)
- local knowledge of the bigger picture of the social, political and economic forces at play (pages 13-16)
- a final comment on a learning programme for people who are active in the local community (page 17).

**Note:** Before reading this chapter it would be useful to look at Chapter 1a. This will give you some background information on lifelong learning, community learning and development, and participatory research.

## **The Community Council – working in a political environment**

The researcher met ten people who are or have been members of the Craigmillar Community Council during a range of individual meetings and group meetings, and met 2 others who had thought about becoming members. With one exception the main aim of these meetings was to talk about the full range of community participation these people undertook rather than just their involvement in the community council.

Within one group there was a strong sense of the political nature of the Council:

*Craigmillar Council is political, it's not about doing fetes, some councils do. It's the nature of the beast, there's no time for other events. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest community in Scotland so we've got a job to do.*

It should not be surprising, then, given this political nature, that there is a significant level of conflict within the Council. These comments came from different people on both sides of the present 'community divide'<sup>1</sup>:

*In this area, there's 'them against us' and 'us against them'; it should na be like that, we should all be pulling together'*

*There's the 'other half of the room', as in any organisation, but (they) won't necessarily admit it.*

*Who's for the community and who's against?*

There is a strong sense of divide across 'local community political lines' and concern that one or other group across this divide could or has taken over – again these comments come from more than one person on both sides of this 'political divide'<sup>2</sup>:

*Major policy in Craigmillar can be impacted on by votes at the Community Council. Meetings and committees can become cliques. The CFS meetings were opened to the public for the big discussions and people were made welcome.*

*Unless you are part of the clique, you don't get to hear.*

Voting on issues is therefore a significant political process and at times a stressful one:

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<sup>1</sup> See also discussion of the present community divide in chapters 1, 8, 9 and 11.

<sup>2</sup> The Community Council has formal processes of communication such as minutes and 'speaking through the Chair' – these comments are about informal communication and sharing information through being part of different networks.

*Intimidating as to which way to vote*

*Two different people approached me during one vote. I'd voted for new member on the council, and no way they'd tell me - you have to go with your instincts.*

One person felt there was some comparison between being on the community council and being a Member of the Scottish Parliament:

*You need to be there speaking for yourself and your constituents. You come together for strength but once there you need to speak for yourself. It's very difficult for MSPs, make a mistake and the media have a field-day.*

However there was also a sense that some people were hoping for a more 'consensus-building' approach:

*... it should na be like that, should all be pulling together'*

*... (need for) coming together*

*you need to understand we've all got different views. Your never going to have 20 people around the table with the same point of view – never works all the time but we're not unique in that, every community council will face what we're facing*

**Comment on learning:** The skills and knowledge that active people have developed within the Community Council are those of 'community politics' and of working with a 'community divide'. These are important skills and knowledge for working within a political environment in which at least two leadership groups work – the leadership group of the Community Council and the leadership group of the Community Regeneration Forum.

However there was also a sense from some members at unease with this approach, and this did not relate to one side of the community political divide only. There seemed to be some people wanting to see a more consensus building approach.

For a learning programme for people active in the community, it would be important to learn more about working with these two different approaches. And in what ways both can be used to '**find common cause**', that is of finding some way forward for a community as a whole. The two approaches could be called '*models*' and described as:

**A 'parliamentary model'**; Here at least two different visions, approaches and leadership groups challenge each other to provide leadership – as in the Scottish Parliament and the Westminster Parliament. Crucial to this model to '*finding common cause*' are: valuing this challenging of each other because it makes better policy and leadership; open access to information, and the

participation of the wider community so that leadership groups have '*legitimacy*' and are seen to '*representative*'. This sort of model works within most City Councils and Parliaments and Assemblies

**A 'consensus building model'**; Here different visions, concerns and interests are, where possible, discussed and the common elements recognised. It may not always be possible to agree and on particular issues, and different groups may decide to 'agree to disagree' but maintain their working relationship. Crucial in this model to '*finding common cause*' are: valuing negotiating and listening; understanding different needs, purposes and priorities; and actively seeking to involve as diverse a group of people and organisations as possible to establish the '*legitimacy*' and '*representativeness*' of the consensus. This sort of model can be seen working within smaller bodies, perhaps networks, federations and partnerships of organisations, or neighbourhood and community forums, partnerships and councils.

Neither model is an easy path to follow nor are they the only paths to follow. They both require a lot of commitment to work successfully, particularly in dealing constructively with conflicts and maintaining respect for their processes. Both are political in that they involve organisations and networks in representing their interests and concerns and finding some way of making decisions to take 'things' forward. Both should *ideally* be well resourced so that they can: involve the wider community; support research and education to increase knowledge on issues, and where relevant hold broad elections, votes or participatory consultation to establish and maintain *legitimacy* and *representativeness*. Both will have different strengths and weaknesses that can be explored and understood – potentially so that the most suitable model can be used for a particular situation.

A learning programme could therefore support local active people in both thinking through the 'pros and cons' of these two models, and in being aware when they are being used, not just at the Community Council but in the wider community within forums and Boards, for instance. This can help local active people understand:

- in what ways they can realistically impact on local decision making processes;
- and the different ways both these different models can be developed locally, and used to '*find common-cause*'.

## **Community Council – improving the process?**

Many people had constructive views on improving the working of the Community Council. Respecting other people and not personalising issues was one theme from some members:

*Importance of respect: you're entitled to your view – it's a democracy; you didn't have to bring personal issues - whether you like them or not, you're not there to be personal.*

*Doing the Participatory Appraisal research on the Urban Design Framework; that's been the best part. There's people on the Community Council whose views I don't agree with but it's nice to sit down with them and do this. Respect for each other's views and then you found their views were almost the same as yours. We're not all puppets to each other, we do have different views. I liked working in smaller groups, I found out what people were like. We achieved a lot more ...*

People talked too about the value of preparation for meetings:

*A pre-meeting is being organised by the community empowerment worker to discuss things beforehand.*

*Go and meet with different people (staff from different organisations) to find out what's going on.*

One group had a strong vision of how the Council could work and spoke of the importance of developing a collective training programme for the council that would include:

*Democracy  
How meeting's function – practical stuff; training on better meetings  
Broader policy – for example 'to guard against being led up the garden path'*

And:

*Local policy – regeneration and planning issues  
Broader social policy – city-wide, national, international*

Another person spoke of the value of an independent facilitator for training sessions to bring the different sides together.

**Comment on learning:** The range of ideas people had on improving the workings of the Community Council are many including:

- understanding democratic working
- working respectfully

- developing meeting skills
- understanding local and national policy.

These form a valuable set of themes for a learning programme to support people in thinking about and learning from further. Not just for work within the Community Council but in other political environments, and potentially in 'non-political' ones too.

What a learning programme needs to consider further is how to support people in both understanding what these mean in theory, and exploring how they can be used in practice. This has to be more than an exercise in learning about what others think 'should' happen, but in working out together what will work best. So for instance, what should '*working respectfully*' mean in the context of a very political environment like the Community Council where groups and networks have different interests. It is likely that common agreement can be reached only if members and others connected with and committed to the Community Council find a way to have this discussion.

## **Community council – working to increase community involvement**

Members were also thinking about how to bring a wider participation in the work of the council.

One group spoke of the Council needing to be:

*A broad and representative group of organisations and individuals ... Community Councils are increasingly recognised as first point of contact ... they are democratically elected and representative and so have status within the community ...*

Others spoke of the need to increase youth participation beyond the two youth reps. This was echoed in the thinking of the Revolting Youth Group<sup>3</sup> who attended one meeting – a particularly stormy one. They commented:

*‘Some of us really enjoyed going to the community council, a local group that meets every 6-8 weeks to make decisions about the local community – and other found it really REALLY boring!! It was interesting to watch adults behave like children ...’*

Whilst some of the group found it boring others were concerned to see a stronger role for young people, for instance:

*‘All this stuff affects us, we are the future generation and none of us ever knew these decisions happen without finding out what we think ...’*

The ‘research group’<sup>4</sup> commented that other community councils have connections with other young people’s organisations:

*Church, Guides, Scouts and Girls Brigade*

They were also concerned to make sure council meetings were widely publicised.

Another person felt strongly that the Community Council needed a better local profile:

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<sup>3</sup> Revolting Youth is a pilot training course for young people developed with young people by Café K, the Jack Kane Community Centre, the Capacity Building Project, City of Edinburgh Council Community Education and the Craigmillar Partnership, which “aimed to provide ‘alternative active citizenship’ and explore the responsibilities of society, the government and those in local community structures to young people”. See the two Revolting Youth reports available from the Jack Kane Community Centre, Niddrie Mains Rd, Edinburgh.

<sup>4</sup> ‘The research group’ was a mix of local active people from different parts of the community. It involved 7 different local active people; 4 people who were volunteers or activists; 3 people who were both staff with local organisations, lived locally and were active in the community and 2 people who were staff in local organisations but did not live locally also attended 1 meeting. There were 3 meetings in all – some people attended once, some twice.

*It's important for the community to see what the Community Council is doing. At the moment in the Chronicle, for a while there's letters back and forth<sup>5</sup> from people on various projects ... for whatever reasons. Be good to see something positive said about the Community Council rather than it being put into disrepute all the time.*

The consultation on the Draft Urban Design Framework, commissioned by the Community Council, in which almost 300 local people of all ages were asked their views is one example of way the Council is presently working to maintained its connectedness with the wider community – see *Chapter 8* for a fuller description of this piece of work<sup>6</sup>.

**Comment on learning:** There was a clear sense of many Community Council members both working to make stronger connections with the wider community, and thinking further about what this could and should mean.

For a learning programme, it would be valuable for local people to consider the different ways the Community Council can engage with the wider community, including getting more people to participate and connect with the Council. Another useful area to consider would be how local people might seek to raise the issues that matter to them and impact constructively on its decision making.

The commentary from the young people involved in the Revolting Youth group was intriguing both because of their mixed reaction – some were excited, some bored- and also because of what they described as adults behaving like children. Other people who've been to Community Council meetings have made similar points. This may not be as surprising as it seems given the political nature of the Council, and in fact it sounds very similar to the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments. It can be seen as evidence of the passion and commitment of members to local issues and to the Council. The response of the group highlights the difficulty in making political issues, even local issues, interesting and relevant to a broad number of people in the community. This is a challenge for a learning programme too.

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<sup>5</sup> Between different sides of the community divide

<sup>6</sup> The Final Report on the community consultation led by Scottish Participatory Initiatives on the Draft Urban Development Framework is available from the Capacity Building Project website at: <http://www.craigmillarcommunitycouncil.org/UDFConsultationReport.doc>

### **Other local decision making – frustrations for active people**

There was frustration amongst some people at other local decision and information sharing processes. There was a concern held by a number of different people within the 'research group' in decision making around Craigmillar Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) funding:

*Lots of money going to waste in Craigmillar; very frustrating and disheartening.*

*Small initiatives for the people by the people are then swallowed up by larger organisations. Targets, aims and objectives put small groups under pressure – such groups don't fit into their criteria.*

This same concern about funding issues was raised by two other groups.

In another group there was concerned about who gets European Funding<sup>7</sup>, why they get it, and what they do with it. Six local organisations presently are supported in getting European funding as match funding for their other funding. The group were frustrated that they didn't know what larger organisations are doing and how they are spending both Social Inclusion Partnership Funding and European Funding.

Another group was concerned for their neighbourhood to get its right share of SIP funding:

*Hope they up it (the budget) next year ... so Bingham's getting its fair share of its money.*

Frustration within 'the research group' was not only aimed at the Craigmillar SIP but also towards other powerful local bodies such as PARC (the Craigmillar Joint Venture Company):

*Changing the name to 'Greater Craigmillar' – is this a mistake? The JVC, don't listen, what is going to happen about this cos their minds are made up.*

And also for opportunities for local community groups to join in networking and strategy groups aimed at community services and community organisations:

*Non- professional, community people can bring a fresh perspective to it, it's not a diverse group – there's a community education bias ... my computer's not working properly so I can't get information properly*

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<sup>7</sup> European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF). For more information go on to the internet at: [www.esep.co.uk](http://www.esep.co.uk) and [www.objective3.org](http://www.objective3.org)

This sense of a wider group of local active people wanting to know and impact on what is happening within strategic issues, and wanting to have impact on strategic decision making meant that the 'research group' felt that local people needed a stronger understanding of being political in their area and that this is a complex set of skills to master:

*People who aren't educated – if you don't use big words who would ken what you say? Puts you off in meetings ...*

*Good to be 'political': to have a view on funding, raise awareness, and be careful*

They recognised too that this can create tensions:

*If people want to get too political, other people start dropping out.*

Information and opportunities to get genuinely involved for local people were also important. The 'research group' felt that these were important:

*Access to information ... on SIP funding.*

*Ask people what they would do with the funding.*

**Comment on learning:** There is a clear need for a learning programme to support some local active people in finding solutions to the frustrations they feel keenly, by:

- supporting them in understanding how they can get involved already and in building the confidence, skills and networks to use these processes.
- considering how the wider community can be further involved in local decision making such as the broad direction and themes for both use of SIP funding and developing plans for regeneration.

This was also echoed in a meeting with a worker from outside of the area who supported the development of the ACT course<sup>8</sup> and saw the need, generally not just within Craigmillar, for community activists to think about how they can represent people effectively and how the sorts of participatory research tools and methods discussed in Chapter 8 would be of value to them.

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<sup>8</sup> The ACT course, 'A Consortium of Training', is a training course for part-time and volunteer staff in Community Learning and Development. It is aimed at local authorities and voluntary organisations and is for those involved in work with 5-12's, youth work, adult learning or community work. Current consortium members are: Midlothian Council, Moray House Institute (University of Edinburgh), Scottish Borders Council, West Lothian Council and Craigmillar Capacity Building Project. The training is accredited – that is it is recognised by colleges and university.

### **Seeing the bigger picture (1)**

One person commented on the value for active people of going further afield and learning:

*Get out and see other things in other parts of the country and abroad. See that there is more to the country and the world than Craigmillar*

The 'research group' made the same point:

*Engaging with groups outside of Craigmillar, you find the same problems and different approaches. It helps if you are looking to find ways to move forward.*

And there was plenty of evidence of people doing this. Here's a short list – but it's not meant to be a comprehensive one:

- Craigmillar Community Arts Board meeting with and advising the Scottish Executive's Enterprise and Culture Committee
- The Children Decide Group at the Venchie meeting with the Welsh Affairs Select Committee and advising Scotland's Children's Commissioner<sup>9</sup>
- Craigmillar SIP reps going with the Craigmillar Joint Venture Company (PARC) to Amsterdam to learn about housing developments there.
- Neighbourhood groups and Community Regeneration Forum linking with groups in Ayr and Stockton.
- Craigmillar Self-builders linking with the self-builders in Fife

And people seeking responsibility within organisations who work across Edinburgh and Scotland, for example – again not a comprehensive list:

- A lay-rep for Quality Improvement Scotland (QIS)<sup>10</sup> and the Community Chest, Heart, Stroke committee at the Local Health Care Cooperative which is becoming a Community Health Partnership
- A Director of the Board of Community Self-Build Scotland (until recently)
- A member of the City of Edinburgh Housing Association Shadow Board

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<sup>9</sup> The Children's Commissioner promotes and safeguards the rights of children across Scotland.

<sup>10</sup> Quality Improvement Scotland is a specialist Health Board that works to improve patient experiences and treatment within health services across Scotland.

- A young person joining Edinburgh Youth Council
- A young person working with the Festival Workshop in Edinburgh on a show called 'Who are you calling a Ned?' which was then performed at the City Council and recorded on video.

Throughout this report individual people have also shown specialist, in-depth knowledge, for instance (not a comprehensive list):

- Council decision making process and community planning (see chapter 8)
- Housing cooperatives and social enterprises (see chapter 9)
- Regeneration and planning (see chapter 9)
- Using the Arts to sustain and change communities (see chapter 9)
- Using participatory research (see chapter 8)
- Working with people – young people and leading meetings (see chapter 4)
- Disability rights and auditing (see chapters 2 and 5)
- Developing your own lifelong learning (see chapter 7)
- Developing community initiatives and organisations (see chapters 6a and 6b)

**Comment on learning:** These active people have knowledge of the bigger picture and how Craigmillar fits within it. Their knowledge together forms a crucial element of the 'pool of community knowledge' held in Craigmillar, and a learning programme can support other local active people in accessing this pool of knowledge, and in using it to make connections with other people and organisations outside of the area.

## Seeing the bigger picture (2)

People also expressed views of how Craigmillar needs to work to develop its role within this bigger picture:

On economic and social development:

*India, South Africa, China, Singapore - they are surging ahead, shaving costs and using Information Technology. There's no landline connections so it's done with mobiles. If it's sustainable in the Third World then it's sustainable here. Nothing that we are asking for is out of reach but red tape is driving up the costs of regeneration – this is a 20<sup>th</sup> century view of economic development. If we don't sort out how Scotland's run then it's all over economically – that's why everybody's leaving Scotland.*

On understanding national policy and regeneration:

Earlier in this chapter we saw members of the Community Council were looking to develop the whole Council's knowledge of the national policy-making context.

On the complex dynamics and realities within communities:

*Seeing the real picture of what's going on: more drugs in the community, and children needing more food, parents needing support as well.*

On the need to recognise how the introduction of Community Planning Partnerships will affect the area:

*Community Planning Partnerships are getting further away from democracy. It's bringing Milton, Portobello, Duddingston, and Craigmillar together. Other wards will be wanting a share of the Community Regeneration Fund<sup>11</sup>. Its devastated Wester Hailes because there are less community reps, so good reps aren't there now and council employers are doing the job instead. The old reps are away now and they really had impressed me. It's possible this will happen with Craigmillar.*

On learning to represent Craigmillar to the media with more depth, in a way that gets closer to the reality of people's lives in Craigmillar in order to tackle the stereotypes put out by some media:

*The politics of issues and filming them is very important. Derelict housing in Craigmillar is often used by TV cameras – puts the emphasis on the poverty in Craigmillar. It affects what people in*

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<sup>11</sup> Community Regeneration Funding is replacing Social Inclusion Partnership funding

*Craigmillar and people outside Craigmillar think about it. For example, the emphasis on drugs, homelessness, crime, sucking in cash – ‘Where’s the cash gone?’ asks the media. Using clichéd stories – walking children passed derelict buildings, drug addicts.*

The Democracy, Disability and Society Group’s experience of doing audits for organisations on disability issues:

*Scottish Parliament – access audit on disability issues. We dug deep into our experience and gave them solutions.*

And doing disability and awareness training:

*Society wants to put disabled people in a box. Equality and awareness training is getting started over the next year. We’ll do our training (for trainers) and then provide training.*

**Comment on learning:** There is a strong awareness among some active people of the need to see the opportunities and the challenges that Craigmillar faces, and develop the alliances and partnerships that are/will support the community in building the future it wants to have.

This is ever more relevant as the Scottish Executive is moving from Social Inclusion Partnerships to Community Planning Partnerships, and Craigmillar will be part of a larger decision making process that will include other local areas – Portobello, Milton and Duddingston.

It would be valuable for these people to share their commitment to engaging with the wider world within any learning programme so that other active people can see the value both personally but also for the community in taking this approach to their community participation and learning.

### **Final comment on learning for people who are active in the community**

This chapter has covered two basic areas: looking at local people's knowledge on development the opportunities for participation in local decision making; and looking at the knowledge, contacts and connections that local people have with wider society. Both are rich pictures that demonstrate the depth of local knowledge and talent – a real resource for this community and for decision makers and policy makers both locally and nationally. Yet is this resource being valued and used?

Helen Crummy<sup>12</sup>, one of the founders of the Craigmillar Festival Society, expresses this perspective on the experience of poverty:

*'There they (people in Craigmillar) will tell you that poverty is not only a lack of an adequate income to live on, it is being classed as of little or no value to society, and as such, having one's capacity for self-fulfilment crippled from birth.'*

How hard is it for the voices of a deprived community to be heard or get heard? Some of the experiences in this report, particularly in Chapters 3 and 8, indicate just how hard this can be. The idea of a 'committed dialogue', suggested by Jane Thompson<sup>13</sup> and discussed in Chapter 1b - a dialogue that involves community, government and services- can seem a long way off. A learning programme for people who are active in the community must work to support local people in being ready for such a dialogue as and when the opportunities arise.

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<sup>12</sup> From 'Let the People Sing' (page 10) by Helen Crummy available from Craigmillar Communiiversity; go on the Internet at: [www.communiversity.org.uk](http://www.communiversity.org.uk)

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 1b pages 12-13 and 17, and also Jane Thompson's (2001) report, 'Rerooting lifelong learning: resourcing neighbourhood renewal.' Details from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education on the Internet at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>.