community enterprise

# Cold Spots of Community-led Activity

November 2024

With thanks to our funders

SRA Scottish Rural Action

WILLIAM GRANT FOUNDATION

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# Executive Summary

## Research Context & Drivers:

Over many years there has been anecdotal indications, from funders and policy makers, that there are areas in Scotland that have been referred to as "cold spots" in terms of community engagement and activity. Sectoral discussions on this issue have ranged from the low take up of grants, reduced rates of volunteering, and low levels of community and third sector activity more generally. This report seeks to examine the evidence behind those anecdotal assumptions utilising a range of data made available from public and third sector partners. By exploring the nature and scale of this issue, as well as the context and drivers behind these patterns, it seeks to better understand what can be done to open up opportunities for cold spot areas.

The study employed a mixed methods approach, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine community-led activity across Scotland. Data was gathered from a variety of sources from open-source Scottish Government statistics to internal data from partners across the third sector. From this data, six 'proxy' measures were selected in order to capture the range of community-led activity. Qualitative data was subsequently gathered through interviews with stakeholders from the third and public sectors to contextualise this data.

The research involved two stages: a national mapping study (supported by the quantitative data) and in-depth regional case studies in seven selected regions. The case studies, based on interviews with local stakeholders, aimed to understand the factors behind cold and hot spots of community-led activity.

## Key Findings:

This research found that 80% of cold spots for community-led activity were in the Central Belt of Scotland, while rural areas generally showed higher levels of such activity. This trend was evident across various measures, including asset ownership, volunteering, and successful grant funding.

The areas with lowest community-led activity were also shown to have the lowest levels of engagement with support programs. Some cold spot areas highlighted a lack of knowledge or strong connection with these support structures. A range of underpinning local factors, however, like context, history, and local relationships were found to impact levels of community-led activity as well as engagement more generally with these support programmes and organisations.

Using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), the research compared deprivation levels and community-led activity across local authority regions. The relationship between cold spots of community-led activity and deprivation was mixed. Statistical tests suggest a weak to moderate inverse relationship between these factors, suggesting that increased deprivation is somewhat linked to lower community-led activity, although a range of other factors are influential.

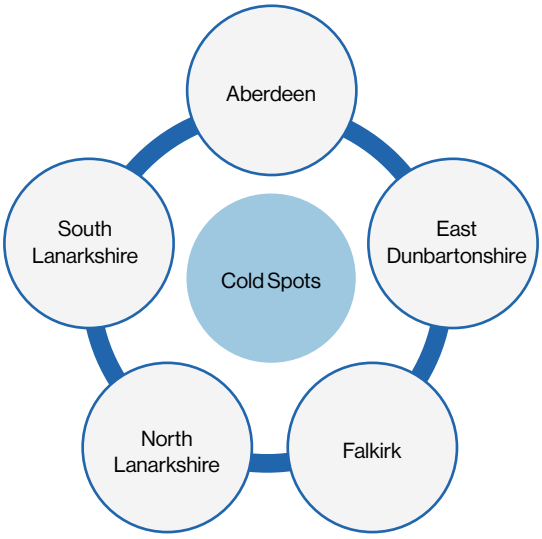



*Figure 4: Five 'coldest' spots of community-led activity in Scotland.*

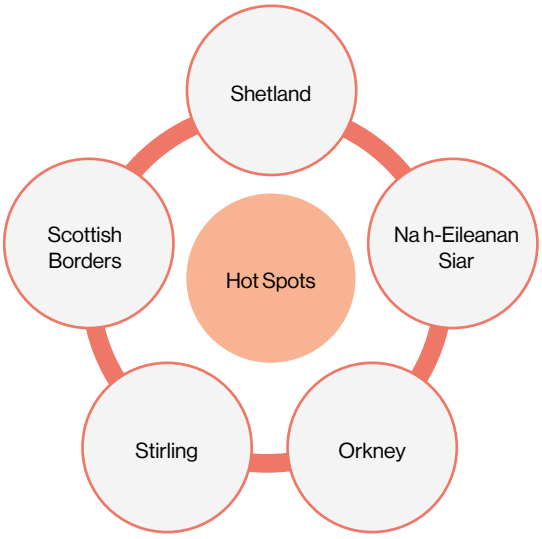



*Figure 5: Five 'warmest' spots of community-led activity in Scotland.*

# Factors influencing community-led activity:

A range of factors were shown across this research to influence and shape community-led activity across Scotland. These factors may act as an enabler or barrier for community-led activity and a summary of these factors is outlined below:

### Deprivation and De-industrialisation:

Both highly deprived and affluent areas exhibit low community-led activity for different reasons. Deprived areas face barriers like skills constraints, while affluent regions often have high service provision and commuting populations that limit local initiatives. Overall, the relationship between community-led activity and deprivation is not clear cut with other factors influencing this relationship.

### Community Stability:

Stable communities with stronger social bonds and collective identity are more likely to engage in community-led initiatives. Key factors such as economic opportunities, affordable housing, and educational opportunities locally all influence this stability. Transient communities, and lack of local connections, can be seen within cold spot areas within this research e.g. Aberdeen.

### Geographical Context:

Rural areas frequently fill service gaps with community-led solutions and market failures in rural areas often create spaces for community-led activity. Investment flows, transport infrastructure and history and tradition of community activism also affect the vitality of rural communities.

### Asset Ownership:

Community-owned assets are more prevalent in rural areas, though urban ownership is increasing. Support and legislation for urban community ownership is more recent when compared to the history and legacy within rural communities. The ripple effects from successful community asset ownership were noted as impacting upon neighbouring communities, encouraging and enabling other successful community-led activities in the region. Low success rates in community asset transfers were noted within deprived communities and leasing arrangements are often highlighted as an alternative – or stepping stone - to community ownership. However, a lack of available data on leasing limits research on the impact of leasing versus ownership for community-led activity.

### Identity and Attitudes:

Community identity and attitudes, shaped by individual and collective perceptions, significantly influence community-led activity. These perceptions, both internally by the community and externally by regional authority's shape and influence community-led activity. Risk-aversion and traditional service models in local authorities pose additional barriers e.g. North Lanarkshire.

### Systems and Processes:

Complex and opaque application processes, lack of collaboration among stakeholders, and inadequate infrastructure were found to hinder community-led initiatives. These issues may be found across a range of organisations and local authorities across Scotland, but the wider context of cold spot areas can make these bureaucratic systems more challenging to successfully negotiate.

### Strategic Drivers:

Coordinated vision and buy-in from various stakeholders are crucial to create the conditions for community-led activity to thrive. Tokenistic engagement and limited decision-making power for communities was highlighted within cold spot areas.

### Relationships:

Strong and stable relationships between stakeholders are essential for high community-led activity. Poor inter-agency dynamics and competition for funding can impede collaboration. Challenges with staff movement in public sector roles also impede trusting relationships to form, and limited knowledge sharing within and between organisations. Cold spot areas had limited connections with key national support programmes or organisations. Areas with regional support agencies appeared to have higher levels of community-led activity.

### Funding Challenges:

Reduced funding and increased competition for resources remain a core barrier to community-led initiatives. The main issues include capacity requirements for securing funding, access to the right type of resource, competitiveness, and a need for diversification. Local funding sources linked to windfarms, or the oil and gas industry, were noted as a critical source of investment for areas with high levels of community-led activity e.g. Shetland.

## Learning and Recommendations:

The challenges of cold spots in relation to community-led activity across Scotland are, in many regions, long-standing and complex. Learning from this research seeks to highlight ways in which opportunities associated with community-led activities can be better balanced across these different regions, highlighting key areas for investment and support. Several recommendations emerged from this work that, whilst potentially beneficial for all areas, are of critical importance for cold spots.

1. **Capacity Building and Support** - Investing in early-stage capacity building and providing resources and training programs to enhance organisational and leadership skills.
2. **Relationship Building and Knowledge Sharing** - Facilitating opportunities to promote cross-sectoral learning and cooperation.
3. **Local Investment Flows** - Leveraging local investment through policy levers like Community Wealth Building (CWB) to maximise local benefits.
4. **Transparency and Accountability** - Enhancing transparency within systems linked to community-led activities, ensuring inclusive decision-making processes.
5. **Genuine Engagement** - Moving towards genuine co-production with communities by investing in skills and capacity building at all levels.
6. **Celebrate Success** - Promoting local success stories to inspire and motivate further community engagement.
7. **Support Organisations** - Increasing awareness of existing support programs through local networks and creating stronger bonds between community anchor organisations and regional support agencies.
8. **Change Takes Time** - Recognising the slow nature of change in cold spot areas and the need for long-term planning, commitment and sustained investment.
9. **Locally Designed Solutions**: Promoting locally designed solutions and devolved decision-making processes to address unique local challenges.

## Conclusion

Policymakers and practitioners should tailor support strategies to address the unique challenges of cold spots. The cold spot areas identified and explored within this research represent regions that would benefit from support and investment that is shaped by an understanding of the local context. Enhancing community capacity, improving local funding and investment, and fostering stable community environments are essential for balancing opportunities for community-led activities across different regions.

# Context for research

## Introduction

The Scottish Government has committed to the Place Based Principle "to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement, and improve the impact of combined energy, resources and investment".[1] Despite this commitment to a place-based approach to development, particular areas throughout Scotland continue to be seen as cold spots for community-led activity.[2] Funders, government departments, and support organisations often recognise and report on these cold spots but little is understood about why they are cold spots, whether the reasons are different in different areas, how they relate to each other and if there are clear solutions to these probably complex and deep-rooted problems.

This research proposal follows the publication of A Different Approach to Community-Led Asset Development and continues the partnership between Community Enterprise and William Grant Foundation to deliver high quality research in the gaps that the sector identifies, and which fit well with the ethos and approach of both organisations. We also acknowledge the support and advice provided by Scottish Rural Action who helped embed a rural perspective within this research.

Over many years, anecdotal evidence has been gathered regarding apparent cold spots that exist throughout Scotland in relation to asset development, scale and number of grant applications, membership of networks, number of community-led plans etc. This has aligned with recent conversations with wider stakeholders about broader issues relating to cold spots. Community Land Scotland, DTAS, various Lottery distributors, and Scottish Community Alliance[3] all recognise that there are common cold spots for these measures and that this research is an area of particular interest.

Community Land Scotland published a briefing paper in 2022 that explored cold spots of community asset ownership[4], the SRUC conducted research for the Plunkett Foundation on cold spots for community business[5] and Scottish Community Alliance also commissioned research from a network member perspective.[6] There is, therefore, not only a real demand for this to be considered in further detail but also highly supportive national partners and a foundation on which to build research.

Within the literature, the term 'cold spot' has varied depending on the perspective of the organisation in question; from levels of community owned assets to place-based grant-making.[7] When exploring cold spots of community-led activity there is no single, common definition in the literature. However, within this research we use the term 'cold spot' to highlight potential areas with:

- Limited levels of community activism and engagement.
- Limited community control over local decisions that affect them.

1 Scottish Government (2019) Place Principle. **https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/**
2 Community Land Scotland (2021) Community ownership cold spots briefing.
3 SCA is a a coalition of community based, national networks and intermediaries: https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk
4 See 2
5 SRUC (2022) Growing the Community Business Network UK-wide: Understanding the 'cold spot' areas where Plunkett Foundation supports fewer community businesses. **https://plunkett.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Plunkett-Foundation-Cold-Spots-Research-final-copy.pdf**
6 Unpublished, some early SCA membership data available within the Community Land Scotland (2021) Community ownership cold spots briefing (page 4).
7 See 2 and **https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/what-we-do/thematic-programmes/place-based-programme/**

# Research Approach

## Research Aim and Objectives:

This research seeks to better understand regional patterns of community-led activity within Scotland, exploring 'cold spots' of low community-led activity and the local context behind these areas. In order to meet this research aim, the following objectives underpin this study:[8]

- To map out areas of 'cold spots' across Scotland and explore the underpinning rationales behind these.
- To identify barriers and enablers of community-led activity using case studies of 'hot' and 'cold' spots.
- To develop key learning and recommendations around these 'cold spot' areas for policy and practice across rural and urban settings.

## Methodology

This research took a mixed-methods approach to data collection, utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was available from a variety of sources, from third sector support organisations to Scottish Government statistics. The Community Enterprise team undertook secondary data analysis on this information in order to map out patterns of community-led activity across Scotland. In total, 10 different sources of quantitative data supported this work with 6 of these chosen as 'proxy measures' for community-led activity.[9] These proxy measures (shown in Figure 2) were selected after extensive discussion within the Community Enterprise research team and consultation with our Steering Group of industry and academic experts.

Additional qualitative data was gathered through interviews to contextualise and delve deeper into the patterns emerging across the mapping phase of research. These interviews were conducted with a range of participants from the third sector and public sector across Scotland – from support agencies, community anchor organisations, grassroots social enterprises, and Local Authorities.

Initially, a research roundtable was hosted to explore definitions and understandings of cold spots of community-led activity, data sources and methodologies, and key questions to consider within this research. This event consisted of 8 participants from 6 organisations across the third sector, funding bodies and academia. This event helped shape the direction of the research, ground it within previous work and explored potential sources of data, to map community-led activity. Two stages of research subsequently sought to explore and understand levels of community-led activity across Scotland.

Firstly, a mapping study was undertaken to explore this on a national level. Subsequently, in-depth case studies were developed through qualitative research interviews with regional stakeholders. Across seven selected regions, case studies were undertaken in order to delve into the context and rationales behind the emerging patterns of cold spots.

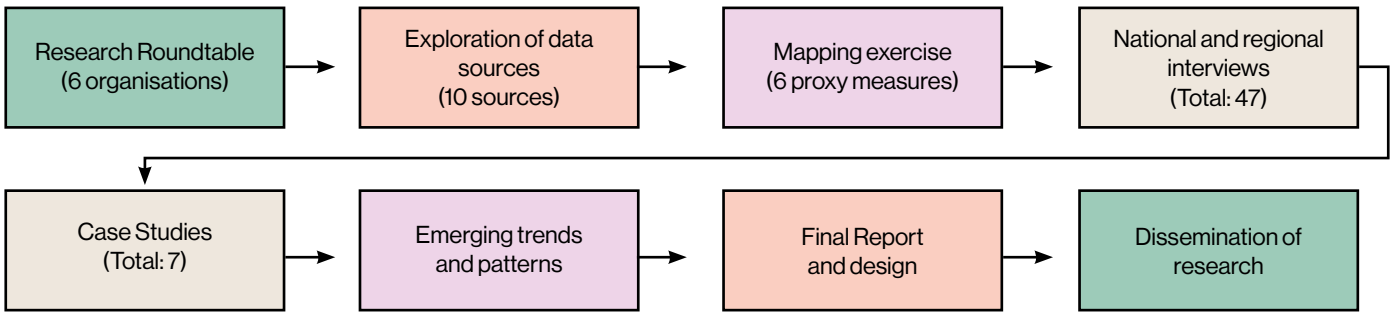



*Figure 1: Process underpinning research – from inception to dissemination.*

8 The objectives were co-produced during roundtable discussions between Community Enterprise and a steering group of academic and third sector partners.

9 See Appendix

## Stage 1: Mapping and Proxy Measures

- Areas of low community-led activity – no one single measure to capture this.
- We used 6 'proxy' measures (calculated per 10,000 people). These were chosen to capture the range of potential community-led activity, from volunteering to community asset ownership.

| Proxy Measure | Source |
|---|---|
| Levels of volunteering | Scottish Household Survey/Volunteering Scotland |
| Number of Social Enterprises | Social Enterprise Census (2021) |
| Number of Registered Charities | OSCR |
| Number of Community-owned Assets | Scottish Government 'Community Ownership in Scotland 2022' |
| Number of National Lottery Community Fund projects | The National Lottery Community Fund (2021) |
| Number of Accelerate projects | Community Enterprise 2022 |

*Figure 2: Proxy measures and data sources used in research*

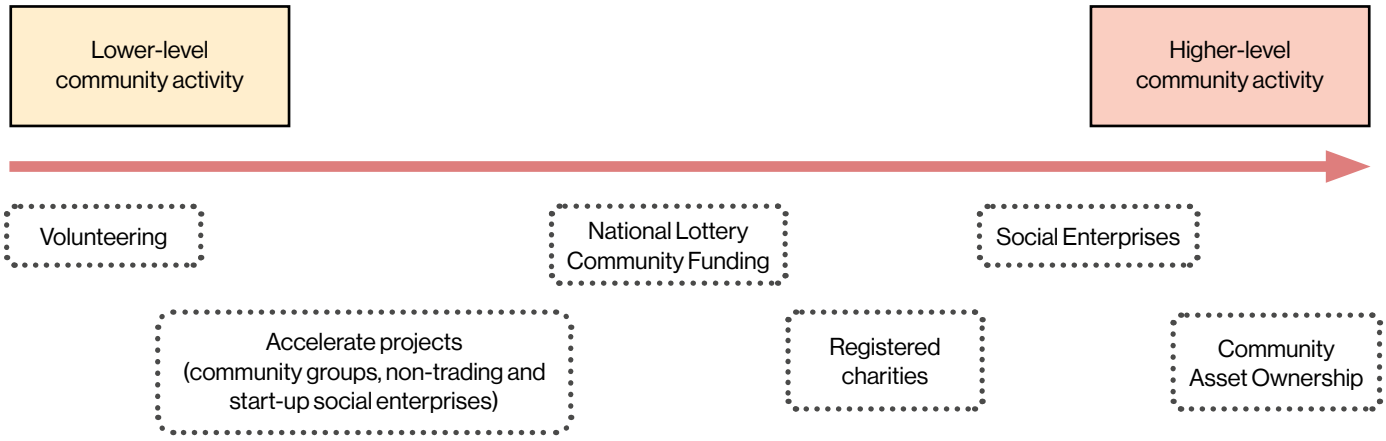



*Figure 3: Spectrum of community-led activity and related proxy measure for data collection*

As part of this mapping study, we also reviewed data from a range of third sector support organisations and programmes including SES membership, SCVO membership, DTAS membership, and Just Enterprise[10] projects. These additional measures enabled a comparison of community-led activity with levels of engagement and interaction with support agencies and programmes. We also utilised SIMD data to explore these patterns in relation to deprivation.

10 Funded by the Scottish Government, the Just Enterprise programme is delivered by a consortium of Third Sector partners. The 2023-27 contract is fulfilled by Community Enterprise, CEIS, CEMVO, Firstport, Impact Hub Inverness, InspirAlba, inspirent, SEI, Social Enterprise Academy, Social Investment Scotland, Social Value Lab, and The Circle.

## Stage 2: Regional Case Studies

Seven local authority regions were selected for in-depth case studies. These represent differing levels of community-led activity. They were selected on the basis of enabling further exploration of community-led activity from the lowest levels to areas that have changed over time, to recognised 'hot spots' of community activity. The need to explore urban and rural stories was also recognised by the research team and factored into the decision-making of case study selection. The mapping exercise of cold spots across Scotland facilitated this selection.

## The seven case studies included within this research are as follows:

| Region | Rationale for inclusion |
|---|---|
| *Aberdeen* | *Identified as a 'cold spot'.* |
| *Dumfries and Galloway* | *Area that has gone through change – moving from a 'cold spot' to an area with higher levels of community-led activity* |
| *Dundee* | *Mixed pattern of community-led activity with several measures of 'cold spot' activity.* |
| *East Dumbartonshire* | *Identified as a 'cold spot'.* |
| *Falkirk* | *Identified as a 'cold spot'.* |
| *North Lanarkshire* | *Identified as a 'cold spot'.* |
| *Shetland* | *Identified as a 'hot spot'.* |

*Table 1: Seven regional case studies*

Case studies on these seven regions were developed through in-depth qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders across each region. For each area, a range of perspectives were sought to reflect on community-led activity – and the challenges of this locally. Interviews were conducted with local authority staff, local Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), local funding officers, community anchor organisations, and grassroots social enterprises. Between 4 and 7 interviews were conducted per region and an online focus group was also conducted within Shetland to bring together different local authority staff into one session.

# ‘Cold Spot’ Mapping

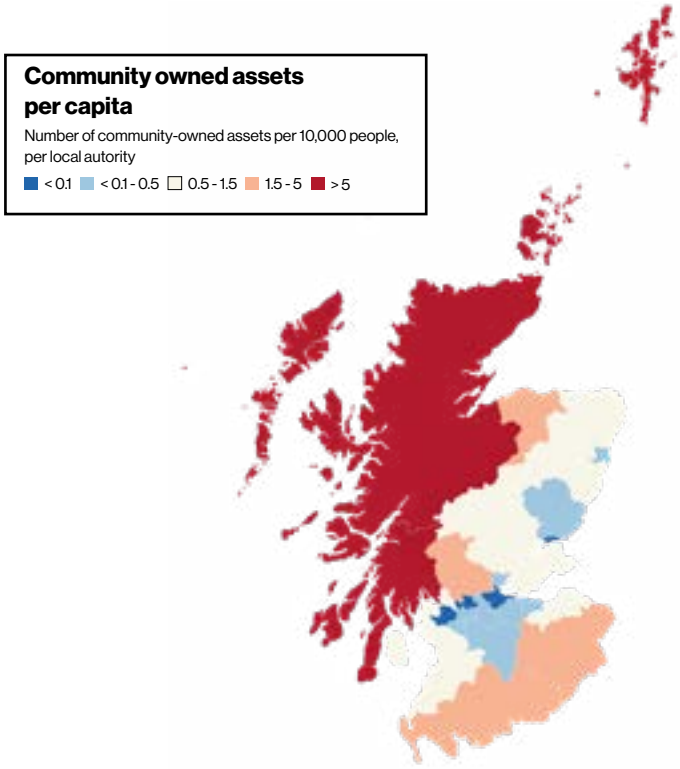
## 1. Community Asset Ownership

High levels of Community Asset Transfers in rural areas and Islands e.g.:

- Highland
- Na h-Eileanan Siar
- Shetland
- Orkney
- Argyll & Bute

Less likely to have occurred in cities and the Central Belt more generally e.g.:

- Falkirk
- Renfrewshire
- Dundee
- East Dunbartonshire



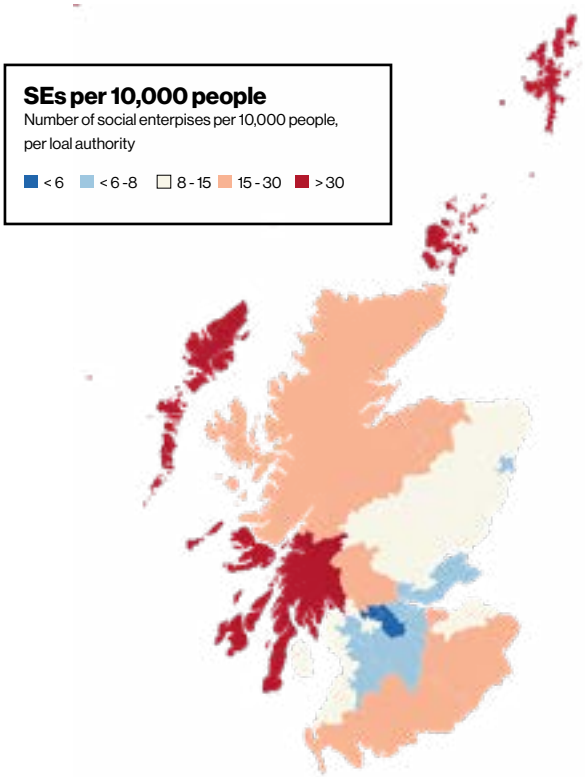

## 2. Social Enterprises

High proportion of social enterprises per capita across rural areas and islands compared to urban centres:

- Shetland
- Na h-Eileanan Siar
- Orkney
- Argyll & Bute

Lower proportion of social when weighted by population across the Central Belt and other urban centres. Particular cold spots within:

- East Dunbartonshire
- North Lanarkshire



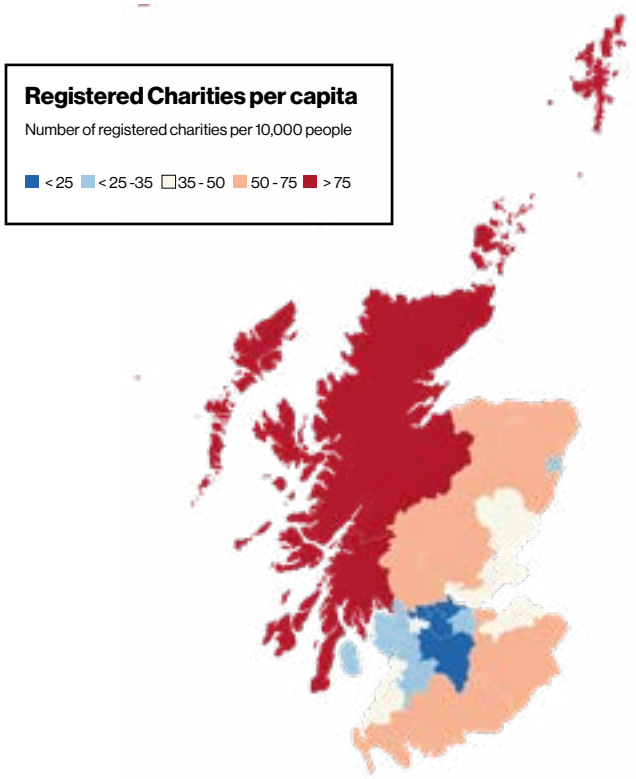
## 3. Charities

Numbers of charities weighted by population demonstrates similar trends as previous mapping measures. There are high proportions of charities per capita across rural and island communities in Scotland:

- Shetland
- Na h-Eileanan Siar
- Orkney
- Highland
- Argyll & Bute

Coldest spots can be seen across the Central Belt and urban centres including:

- Falkirk
- North Lanarkshire
- East Dunbartonshire
- South Lanarkshire.



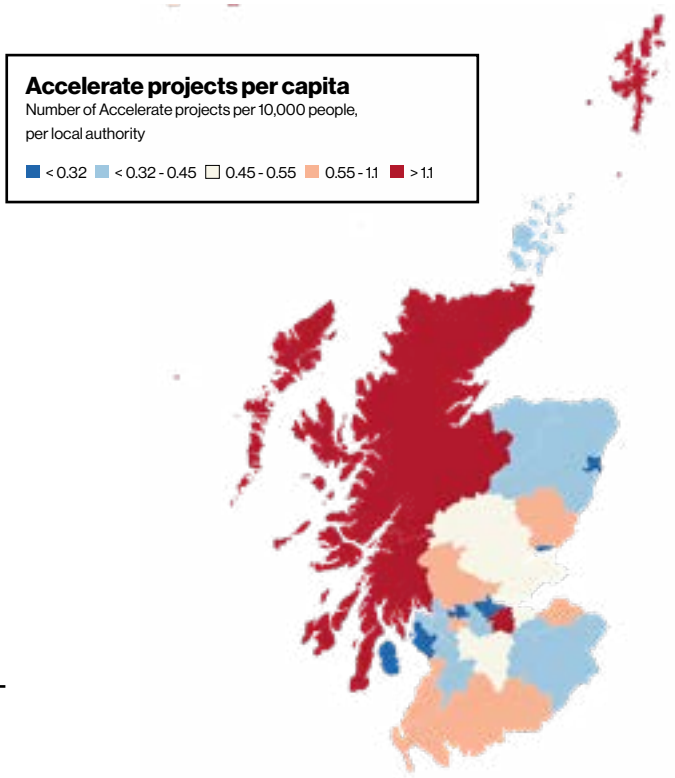

## 4. Accelerate projects: as a measure of early/start-up community activity

There was a high degree of engagement with the Accelerate support programme across:

- Na h-Eileanan Siar
- Shetland
- West Lothian[11]
- Highland
- Argyll & Bute

Less likely to have occurred in cities and the Central Belt more generally e.g.:

- Falkirk
- Renfrewshire
- Dundee
- East Dunbartonshire




11 Likely linked to location of support provider Community Enterprise in West Lothian.

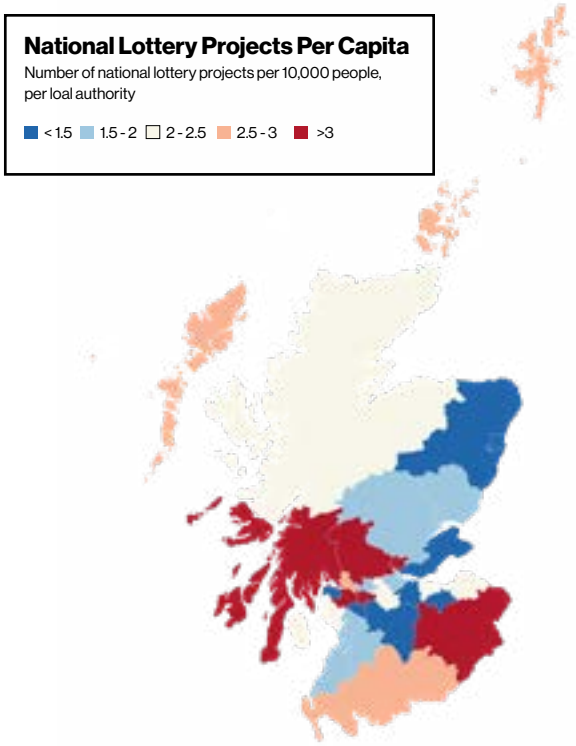
## 5. Lottery funded projects[12]

Successful National Lottery Community Fund projects were seen to demonstrate a degree of community-led activity. Successful funding applications were highest across:

- Clackmannanshire
- Renfrewshire
- Glasgow City
- Scottish Borders
- Argyll and Bute

Coldest spots for Lottery funding success can be seen across:

- West Lothian
- Aberdeen
- Aberdeenshire
- Fife
- Midlothian



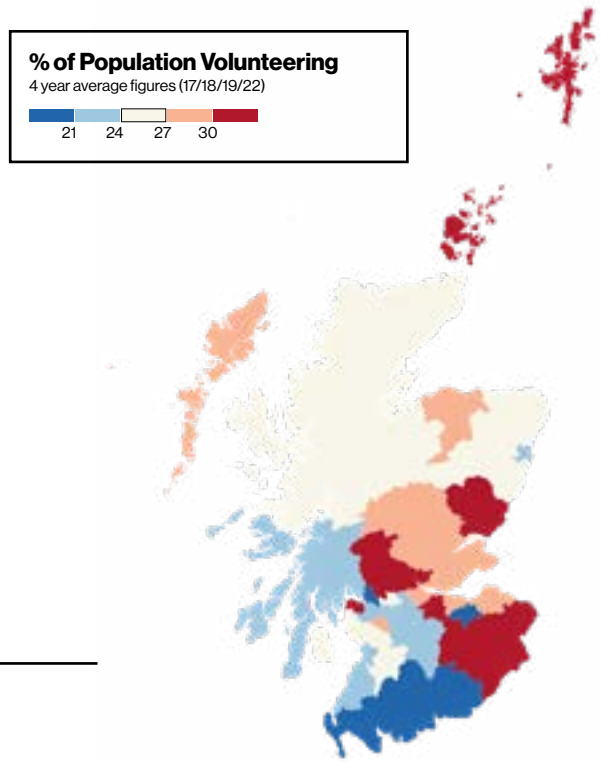

## 6. Volunteering levels: percentage of population regularly undertaking volunteering [13]

Areas with the highest average levels of volunteering show a mixed picture nationally e.g.

- Shetland
- Stirling
- Scottish Borders
- Inverclyde
- West Lothian

The lowest levels of volunteering can be seen across:

- West Dunbartonshire
- Dumfries & Galloway
- Midlothian
- Aberdeen
- Glasgow




12 Presence of locally-based funding officers credited with high degrees of engagement locally e.g., **https://bigblogscotland.org.uk/2024/04/30/our-place-based-teams-in-scotland/**

13 4-year volunteering average utilised to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 on dataset. Calculated using 2019 – 2023 data from Scottish Household Survey with support from Volunteering Scotland.

# Exploring ‘Cold Spots’ of Community-led Activity

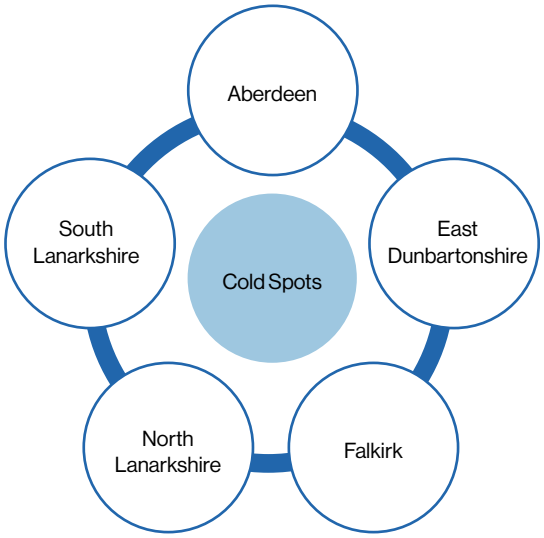



*Figure 4: Five 'coldest' spots of community-led activity in Scotland.*

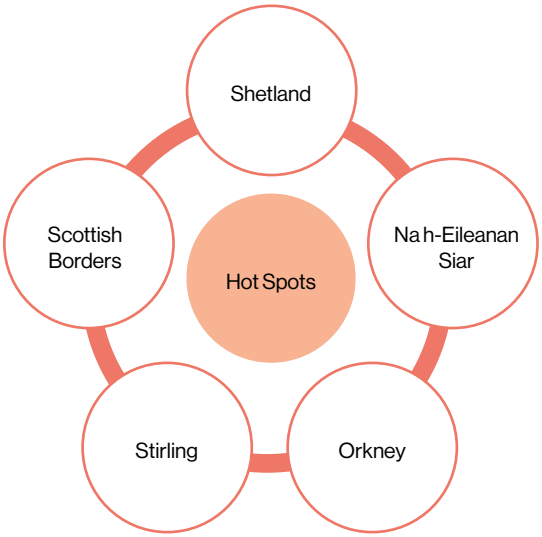



*Figure 5: Five 'warmest' spots of community-led activity in Scotland.*

A number of key patterns and trends emerged from the various proxy measures utilised within this research. As highlighted in Figure 4, 80% of coldest spots for community-led activity were within the Central Belt of Scotland, with the fifth area an urban centre in the northeast. In contrast, rural areas trended towards higher levels of community-led activity. This can be seen within a range of proxy measures from asset ownership to engagement with the Accelerate support programme. Four of the five 'warmest' spots of community-led activity are within rural local authority areas.[14] Three of these Local Authorities have the highest proportion of very remote-rural communities in Scotland.[15]

We also examined the five coldest areas identified within this research against connection to sources of support for community-led activity[16] Engagement with support organisations and programmes was lowest in the following 5 local authority areas:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aberdeen | North Lanarkshire | Falkirk | East Dumbartonshire | South Lanarkshire |

*Five areas with the lowest connection to support agencies and programmes.*

These five areas match the overall coldest areas for community-led activity within this research (see Figure 4). Clearly support provision – from key national agencies and programmes - can be seen to map closely to the coldest areas for community-led activity. Low levels of engagement with support agencies and programmes forms part of the rationale for low levels of community-led activity in these local authority areas. Efforts to promote and raise awareness of the support available may facilitate greater engagement within these areas. This research also recognises that only national level support agencies are represented within this data. Some regions have well-established and trusted regional support organisation that work closely with their local communities to facilitate community-led activity in these areas. Many of these regional support organisations work across rural local authority regions e.g., Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise.[17][18]

14 'Rural' local authority areas defined according to Scottish Government 2-fold Urban Rural Classification 2020.
15 'Very Remote Rural' classification according to Scottish Government 8-fold Urban Rural Classification 2020.
16 Engagement with support agencies and programmes was examined through membership numbers for national support orgs (DTAS/SCVO/SES) and national support programmes (Just Enterprise/Accelerate).
17 Some regional support providers will be contained within the wider Just Enterprise consortium figures of support e.g., Impact Hub Inverness and InspirAlba.
18 There are some examples of regional support to urban areas e.g., Community Ownership Hub at Community Land Scotland operated within Glasgow and Inverclyde. This project was closed in 2024.

Other underpinning factors are also likely to shape the limited engagement with support providers in these cold spot areas. Issues such as local context, history, mindset as well as local relationships and systems are likely to impact engagement with support as well as interest and engagement with community-led activity more generally. These issues are explored in more detail in the following section.

In order to consider the relationship between deprivation and cold spots of community-led activity, data from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) was utilised within this research. The SIMD can be utilised to explore deprivation levels by local authority area.[19] This information enabled a comparison between deprivation levels and community-led activity by local authority region. Table 2 illustrates the coldest and warmest regions for community-led activity alongside their deprivation ranking out of 32 local authority regions.

| **Cold Spots** | **Deprivation ranking 1 = most deprived** | **Hot Spots** | **Deprivation ranking 1 = most deprived** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aberdeen | 18th | Shetland | 32nd |
| East Dunbartonshire | 24th | Na h-Eileanan Siar | 30th |
| Falkirk | 14th | Orkney | 29th |
| North Lanarkshire | 6th | Stirling | 20th |
| South Lanarkshire | 10th | Scottish Borders | 27th |

*Table 2: Community-led activity compared to deprivation levels per local authority*

When considering community-led activity, hot spot areas appear to occur within less deprived local authorities. However, the rural nature of most of these hot spot areas should be considered. Utilising the SIMD for rural areas has been recognised as challenging. The Scottish Government recognises the limitations that area-based statistics have on more geographically dispersed population[20] and wider research has shown that for income and employment deprivation the sensitivity of the SIMD is lower in remote and rural areas, and in island local authorities.[21]

The SIMD ranking for deprivation, however, can be useful to explore urban regions of Scotland, such as those highlighted within our cold spots. The cold spots within this research show a mixed picture of deprivation including areas of limited deprivation (East Dunbartonshire) and areas of higher deprivation (North Lanarkshire). Research by Community Land Scotland also illustrated a mixture picture of deprivation when considering cold spots of community ownership, leading to a conclusion that considering deprivation at a local authority level ultimately did not enable a clear pattern to emerge. [22]

This research sought to clarify the relationship between community-led activity and deprivation through a correlation test.[23] A correlation coefficient (r) of -0.47 was calculated between these variables.[24] This indicates a weak-to-moderate inverse relationship between these factors. Therefore, there is some evidence to show that as levels of deprivation increase, community-led activity tends to decrease. However, this relationship is not strongly predictive, indicating that other factors are also influencing this relationship.

19 Scotland's Data on a Map. Areas of Deprivation in Scotland's Councils. **https://datamap-scotland.co.uk/2020/03/areas-deprivation-scotland-councils/**

20 Scottish Government (2017) SIMD Rural deprivation Evidence Summary. **https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2017/02/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-rural-deprivation-evidence-and-case-studies/documents/rural-deprivation-an-evidence-review/rural-deprivation-an-evidence-review/govscot%3Adocument/rural%2Bdeprivation%2Bevidence%2Breview.pdf**

21 McCartney, G. and Hoggett, R. (2023) How well does the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation identify income and employment deprived individuals across the urban-rural spectrum and between local authorities?. Public Health 217 (26-32)

22 See 2

23 A correlation test measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. Correlation tests can be useful to identify if there is a statistical relationship between two variables, but it is important to note that correlation does not necessarily imply causation.

24 A correlation test was conducted between the average deprivation levels (based on SIMD deciles 1, 2 and 3) and cold spot ranking across our 6 proxy measures of community-led activity.

# Regional Case Studies

# Aberdeen

## General Background

Research findings indicate Aberdeen (City) is a 'cold spot' in terms of community-led activity. Participants largely recognised this area as a cold spot and highlighted a range of factors that may contribute to this finding. A potential confounding factor, however, was also suggested to partly explain low levels of social enterprises and charities registered to the local area. There was a suggestion that, due to its historical and geographical links with Aberdeenshire, a number of organisations operate in both areas and, in some instances, may be 'registered' in Aberdeenshire as opposed to the city.

The presence of the Oil and Gas industry over many decades also has had a significant influence on the city's landscape and local economy. For the local third sector, the industry has been a source of significant and ongoing funding – although this has been dwindling in recent years.

The nature of this industry, coupled with a sizeable student population, also creates a higher degree of 'transient' residents within Aberdeen's population, reducing, in the eyes of many respondents, the potential pool of people likely to get involved with the third sector/community activity.

Also, despite the industry's impact on the local economy, Aberdeen still retains persistent areas of significant deprivation.

## Funding

Funding from the Gas and Oil industry was seen by participants as historically an easier process than other traditional funding sources – with fewer questions being asked and funding continuing on a year-on-year basis. With concerns over this source of funding dwindling and becoming more competitive, other routes to sustainability were highlighted as increasingly important to the area. A need for upskilling and assistance in accessing other sources of financial support was highlighted by participants. This was linked to wider funding applications as well as potential opportunities for public procurement.

The third sector's ability to access public sector contracts remains an issue. It was noted that the public sector has limited staff time to devote to supporting this process – as well as reservations about the number of third sector organisations with the ability or capacity to meet contract requirements.

The third sector views the contract process as time-consuming – with little chance of success. The local authority, however, is still keen to address this issue, seeing it not only as a means of supporting and growing the local third sector but also in helping the local authority meet some of its statutory obligations.

Post-Covid, there is a feeling within both the local authority and the TSI, that more is being done and with a greater sense of urgency in trying to get support to frontline organisations. This was noted both in terms of funding as well as other measures such as community asset transfers. The departure from EU funding rules was highlighted as potentially offering an opportunity for a more creative approach in this area.

## Skills/experience

Feedback has suggested that funding/contract experiences have resulted in many organisations not developing the adequate skills and experience to successfully navigate more traditional or statutory funding processes, such as with the local authority, the National Lottery and/or other Trust Funds.

## Relationships

There appears to be a lack of organised networking across the third sector in the city – allowing organisations to share information and learning with one another. Respondents felt that both the local authority and the local TSI could play a greater role in facilitating such activity – citing examples from other areas where this seems to work more effectively. A commitment to positive engagement with the sector would be welcomed, leading to a more cohesive and effective third sector in Aberdeen.

# East Dunbartonshire

## General Background

East Dunbartonshire can be considered a 'cold spot' for community-led activity when examined across many of the measures of community-led activity. Local discussions highlighted a range of potential factors that may have influenced levels of community-led activity. Links were made to low engagement with support organisations and limited community-anchor organisations, especially in areas of deprivation. A lack of affordable local venues was also felt to limit community activity.

Historically, mining was the primary industry in the area which led to the establishment of industrial estates and mining villages. However, today, East Dunbartonshire is viewed, in some quarters, as part of 'Greater Glasgow'. Some participants highlighted this perception has resulted in the region often being overlooked. The proximity to Glasgow also facilitates a high commuter population - potentially impacting the time, energy, and participation levels of local people. The impact that commuting has on these factors can be highly contextual, however, research suggests commuting can have an impact on participation levels in their local community.[25]

East Dunbartonshire is seen as an affluent area with pockets of deprivation. The majority of local datazones are amongst the least deprived areas in Scotland when examined through the SIMD.[26] Specific areas in the region, however, have relatively high levels of deprivation (within 25% most deprived). Participants noted that deprivation can act as a barrier to community-led activity. There was also a feeling, however, that challenging circumstances locally – potentially linked to deprivation – can act as a driver of unity and community engagement. In contrast, more affluent areas may lack similar drivers for change.

## Funding and Support

Lack of awareness around where to go for local support was highlighted, especially for new groups, although several participants highlight the work of the local TSI for support and networking opportunities.

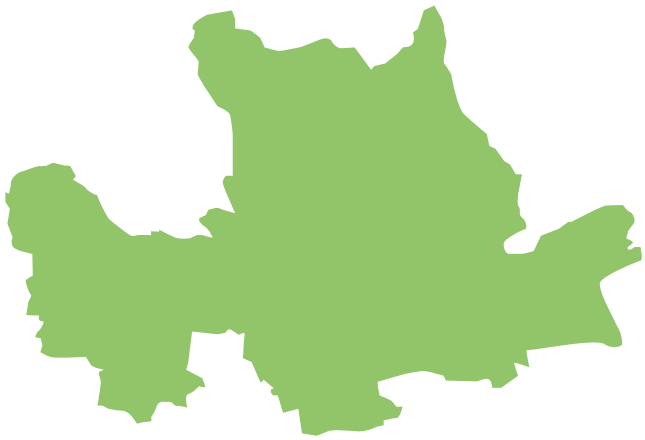
Reduced local authority budgets and increasingly competitive funding were felt to limit community-led activity locally. There was also a mixed response to how and where funding was being allocated. Some participants believed the most deprived areas received more funding support – while others felt more affluent areas received more investment e.g. high street improvements.

## Skills/experience

Greater capacity building support for community organisations was felt to be critical for increasing community-led activity within East Dunbartonshire. Improving ways to communicate through plain language and less acronyms could help remove barriers for those where English is not their first language and establish a shared understanding of what community-led activity means. Overall, there was a sense that for the third sector to grow locally, there was a need to invest in the community-led approach – with funding and skills development – in order to build capacity and confidence in the sector.

## Relationships

Partnership working across East Dunbartonshire was highlighted as an area for improvement by all participants. The local TSI and local authority reflected positively on working on projects such as the Community Grants Scheme. However, differences in understandings around the community engagement, capacity building, and consultation were all highlighted with a need for shared language and understanding identified. Clarity over partner offerings, as well as clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, were felt to be needed to avoid confusion and duplicated efforts.



25 Mattisson K, Håkansson C, Jakobsson K. Relationships Between Commuting and Social Capital Among Men and Women in Southern Sweden. Environ Behav. 2015 Aug;47(7):734-753. doi: 10.1177/0013916514529969.

26 https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/about/our-council/about-the-council/east-dunbartonshire-area-profile?page=18

# Dumfries and Galloway

## General Background

Most participants agreed that the region is a relative 'hot spot' - but still with a lot to do. There is a lot of community activity, but the region as a whole could benefit from a more cohesive strategy for the sector. However, it is also important to note the progress made in Dumfries and Galloway (D&G) over the last decade – moving from being seen as a 'cold spot' to its current status as a 'hot spot'.

There is a history of 'getting on with things' without the help of central government due to the region's distance from the central belt. Dumfries and Galloway itself is a large geographical area with a relatively small population. It was only formed in 1996 and given its rural make up, some respondents feel it has struggled to create a regional identity of its own.

This is compounded by relatively poor transport links within the region – with some respondents feeling it is easier to get to Edinburgh/Glasgow than it is to get between Stranraer and Dumfries.

D&G has an ageing population – with over 25% of the population over 65 - with a lot of retired individuals having the time to volunteer/organise etc. However, this can lead to sections of the community being under-represented.

In particular, participants feel young people need to be encouraged to get involved within their communities and the region as a whole. This is a more realistic prospect as, post-Covid, there appear to be more educational and work opportunities now that many jobs and courses have remote working as an option.

## Funding and Support

The local authority is keen to support the sector but the internal protocols in place make the process, to many, unduly protracted, with the department with closest links to the third sector requiring to seek 'sign off' for certain levels of funding from the economic development department.

This support, nonetheless, has resulted in an above average number of Community Asset Transfers taking place. However, some respondents wished to point out that this does not imply quality - inferring that, in some instances, it appears more about the local authority getting something 'off their hands' as opposed to providing the community with an 'asset'.

## Skills/experience

Poor broadband coverage and digital skills is mentioned by many as an issue in need of being addressed.

Furthermore, some communities are seen as being, "much better at moving the levers of power" than others, with a "pool of talent" that has the time and will to engage with the funding process. According to some perspectives, this can result in certain sections of the community feeling unheard. Examples were cited of small and active communities having developed skills and experience and been successful in securing funds.

More outreach to younger groups is required that could help encourage more youth to stay in the region and provide more long-term interaction/engagement with the sector.

## Relationships

Whilst recognising that a culture of communities helping themselves already exists, most respondents feel there is a need for a more cohesive strategy, covering the whole region. In a time where the public sector is cutting back its service delivery there needs to be a conversation about how the third sector can best slot into those gaps and to determine what local communities want and/or need.

This view was shared by others who feel that through better collaboration and cohesion there is scope for organisations to pool professional services to save time and money and, through better networking, certainly more scope for organisations to share information and lessons learned.

In this way, community activity in Dumfries and Galloway can become even more effective in serving the needs of its local communities.

# Dundee

## General Background

Dundee is a region that can be seen as a 'cold spot' in terms of several proxy measures within this research e.g., Community Asset Transfers. Many respondents however, highlighted a 'vibrant grassroots scene' with many active social enterprises and charities. Community-led activity was felt to be increasing locally, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the confusing support landscape locally and bureaucratic systems were noted as a barrier to community-led ideas and activities coming to fruition.

Dundee as a city continues to experience high levels of deprivation which was noted as a barrier to involvement in community-led activity. The cost-of-living crisis was also viewed as exacerbating this, with people currently more focused on trying to make ends meet.

## Funding and support

There were mixed opinions amongst respondents regarding the support landscape in Dundee. Participants noted that a lack of clarity over where to turn to for support, with the TSI felt to prioritise support and resources to their own projects. There is also the perception of duplication across the support landscape.

Community Asset Transfer applications are low in the region, with differing views on why this is the case. Some believed the local authority is not clear enough about what they are looking for and could provide more detailed guidance. The local authority itself contests this view, suggesting that many community groups prefer to explore the leasing option instead.

Two additional barriers to greater community activity were raised. Firstly, the local authority appears wedded to an old model of economic development, using indicators such as high footfall or new buildings (e.g., V&A) and secondly, greater recognition and acknowledgement should be given to what the third sector can contribute, both socially and economically, to local communities.

## Skills/experience

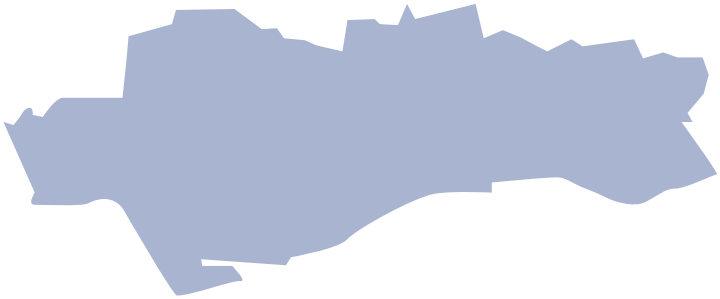
Local skills and experience in community-led activity was highlighted as an area that could be further developed in the area. As with other areas, the cost-of-living crisis is viewed as having an impact on people's time and available resources for skills development and participation. Dundee's above average level of deprivation is also viewed as a barrier to greater community activity.

One other factor raised, specific to Dundee, is that with one of the highest proportions of people in the UK employed in the public sector, there may be a lack of the entrepreneurial skills and confidence needed to set up community initiatives.

## Relationships

One particularly strong and consistent message from Dundee centres on the relationship between local support organisations. Respondents feel strongly that local support organisations have to actively seek to remove any unnecessary duplication of resources and work more collaboratively with one another. Only in doing so will they be able to genuinely impact on growing and supporting the level of community activity in the city.

They would also be contributing by helping to address another concern raised by respondents: the perceived lack of trust within the local authority towards community organisations and their ability to deliver projects. Developing and maintaining positive and effective working relationships across the third sector and with key partners such as the local authority was highlighted as a core aspect of how to continue to grow community-led activity across Dundee.



# Falkirk

## General Background

This research suggests Falkirk is a 'cold spot' of community-led activity. Among local authority areas, it has the fewest registered charities and social enterprises and, to date, only one successful Community Asset Transfer.[27] The TSI however, highlighted local engagement with over 500 local groups and organisations, some of which, they believed, may not be easily captured within measures of community-led activity.

Respondents raised particular issues around areas of deprivation, geography, and rurality. There were varying interpretations of their impact on community activity in the area. There was also a sense that Falkirk, as a town, can be overlooked within the wider Forth Valley region (which covers Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Falkirk). Respondents highlighted a belief that across the region, Stirling generally received more attention and support.

In terms of areas of deprivation in and around Falkirk, there were again contrasting views regarding levels of community-led activity and local investment. Some respondents consider there to be significant local investment, supporting local organisations who are seeking to address poverty and social isolation. Others feel the focus has been more on developing areas of affluence, especially for the purpose of tourism, citing examples such as the Falkirk Wheel, the Forth and Clyde Canal etc.

The rural and urban split in the area was also viewed as having an impact. Rural areas were described as disconnected from town areas and more likely to have an ageing population – with urban areas being identified as having more people and more volunteers.

## Funding and Support

There is some consensus that avenues of support are available via the local TSI, Foundation Scotland, and Bo'net[28] etc. Opportunities for networking and partnership work exist, although access to funding remains an issue, perceived to stem from a lack of capacity building. Language and terminology used in funding applications is also seen as a barrier for those unfamiliar with the funding process.

The local TSI does offer support to community groups and organisations via a network of different thematic groups and forums in an effort to guide them through these processes. It also signposts to national support agencies where appropriate.

## Skills/experience

Although the TSI seeks to provide support (or signpost to support) for organisations at different stages of development, there was a strong feeling that more support and guidance was required. A greater emphasis on building local capacity would be needed. Some respondents suggest a more integrated approach, offering a platform that brings together local community organisations, local support bodies and the local authority to explore how best to address the gaps that currently exist.

## Relationships

There were mixed opinions about the effectiveness of local support and partnership working. The local TSI is recognised as being well connected to the community and considers itself to have a good working relationship with the local authority.

The local authority itself is viewed as being more remote. This has been put down by many, to a lack of Community Learning and Development workers to support the sector and also the perception that the local authority has been more focused on investing in larger tourism-related projects, as opposed to investing in local communities.

27 One successful CAT in June 2023: **https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/news/article.aspx?aid=7495. Several pending review as of Oct 24: https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/people-communities/community-asset-transfer/publication-of-requests.aspx.**

28 **https://bonet.org.uk/**

# North Lanarkshire

## General Background

Most participants agreed that North Lanarkshire could be viewed as a 'cold spot' for community-led activity, although also pointing out that there is a lot of activity amongst small groups supporting their local communities who may not be registered as charities etc.

Lower levels of community-led activity were linked to a combination of factors particular to North Lanarkshire. The region has been struggling with de-industrialisation since the 1980s. There are communities that have been experiencing significant levels of deprivation ever since, which is now exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis. It is also a region where the local authority has historically been the dominant deliverer of services and remains the largest Social Housing provider in Scotland.

With poor transport links within the region, many people, similar to those in other parts of the Central Belt, find it easier to get to Edinburgh or Glasgow than to travel between towns in the region.

Many respondents believe these factors contribute to a reticence from many people to engage in community activity. However, as local authorities withdraw from delivering certain services and local communities look more towards the third sector, respondents appear optimistic that community engagement levels will begin to increase.

## Funding and support

Respondents indicated that the local authority and local TSI are not always easy to engage with, often lacking a clear or specific point of contact to access timely support or information. Challenges in accessing support and information, especially around regional funding, can be seen to exacerbate broader funding challenges at the national level. Funding is increasingly competitive, adding to the time and resources needed to access funds, which respondents felt could be better spent on improving the delivery of their respective services.

The short-term nature of funding is another key issue. Not only does this undermine an organisation's ability to plan for the future, but also its ability to hold on to staff. Losing talent and knowledge on a regular basis requires more time and resources to be spent on retraining and building up its skill base again. Longer term funding, at both a local and national level, was seen as helping to enable groups and organisations within cold spot areas to better work with, engage, and support their communities.

## Skills/experience

Gaps in digital skills locally were highlighted as a challenge to community-led activity. With much of the funding process requiring digital skills, increased support and upskilling around this issue was noted as helping to remove some of these barriers.

Recurring themes, which are not unique to North Lanarkshire, include: 1) more affluent areas having the time, skills and confidence to engage with community-led activity, and the funding process underpinning this activity and 2) a lack of young people engaging in local community activity.

## Relationships

The research suggests there is little collaboration across the region, with some contrasting views on why this remains the case. A number of respondents are aware of the local authority having a 'strategic framework' for engaging with communities. The view locally reflected a belief that there is little driving force behind this framework, and it is not being well communicated to the wider community. On the other hand, the local authority and TSI both indicated challenges with engaging locally, partly due to a lack of community anchor organisations as partners to facilitate this way of working.

There was consensus however, on a call for more 'joined-up thinking' within the region, with a shared vision coming from the local authority and TSI but shaped by the needs of local communities.

# Shetland

## General Background

Shetland can be viewed as a 'hot spot' for community-led activity across the six proxy measures utilised within this research. Shetland benefits from high levels of volunteering (50% higher than the national average), an abundance of assets in community ownership and, over the years, relatively good access to funding.

This region demonstrated strong, positive working relationships across key partners, with participants all speaking positively of one another. A collaborative, joined-up approach to community-led activity emerged from discussions with participants from Shetland.

An important factor in Shetland's relatively high level of community activity stems from the creation of the Shetland Charitable Trust (SCT). SCT was set up in 1976 to receive and disburse money paid by the Oil industry to the local community as compensation for the new terminal operating at Sullom Voe in Shetland.

Another key factor identified was the local mindset. Local residents see themselves as resourceful and self- reliant, because they have had to be. This tradition now forms part of a cultural identity where local communities are resilient and do things for themselves. However, the rural nature of Shetland can both be an enabler and a barrier to community-led activity. Whilst rurality often encourages a mindset of self-reliance and resourcefulness, remoteness also brings with it challenges such as transport, connectivity issues, and the out-migration of young people to urban areas for education and work.

## Funding

Community organisations in Shetland have benefitted over the decades from the presence of SCT. More recently, they have also benefitted from the creation of the Viking Energy Wind Farm's Community Benefit Fund and the Coastal Communities Fund.

However, there is no complacency in this regard, with concerns being raised that the current cost of living crisis and increasing competition for grants may see a number of community organisations becoming increasingly financially vulnerable. Many community organisations are now exploring enterprising activity as a path to sustainability. Interestingly, some feel Shetland being seen as a 'hot spot' could be detrimental as funders may withdraw to prioritise other areas.

## Skills/experience

With a tradition of community-led activity, supported by local funding sources, community organisations have built up significant level of skills and experience. A small, relatively static population has allowed these skills to remain in the community and for strong relationships and networks to form. Local professionals working in the sector and elected members are accessible to communities and people tend to know where to go for support. Furthermore, staff employed in the sector tend to stay consistent, which makes signposting much easier.

## Relationships

Participants across this research, from a mix of backgrounds, spoke favourably of each other. Relationships across the different sectors were well-established and knowledge sharing was apparent. This was felt to help avoid, where possible, competitiveness and duplication of resources.

There is a strong sense that local people have been and continue to be encouraged by the success of others. Peer support networks are in place locally and act as a space to build relationships, share information, and discuss experiences.

# Factors Influencing Community-led Activity

## Local Context and Place:

Deprivation has been linked to the historical trend of de-industrialisation in many areas of Scotland, including those identified within our research as cold spots of community-led activity. These factors can significantly influence and shape the attitudes and behaviours of communities and local authorities. When examining community-led activity and deprivation within this research, the relationship between these two factors is ambiguous. Within the 'coldest' spots for community-led activity, both deprived and affluent regions are present (see Table 2). The prevalence of high and low areas of deprivation as cold spots, however, can be seen to have a range of different underpinning rationales.

For areas of low deprivation, low community-led activity was linked to proximity to urban centres and commuting populations e.g., into Glasgow City for work and services. Generally good service provision and high incomes were also recognised as limiting for local people to drive forward community-led projects and services. On the other end of the spectrum, whilst interest in community-led activity may be high, specific challenges in these areas may limit successful examples of community-led activity. For example, Community Asset Transfer enquiries from communities in deprived areas were high but these areas have been shown to have relatively low success rates in this process.[30] This has been attributed to issues like skills and capacity constraints, as well as risk aversion among local authorities. Additionally, there's a prevailing preference in some local authorities for leasing arrangements over ownership for the transfer of local authority owned buildings and land. Anecdotally, leasing arrangement were viewed as a 'stepping stone' to ownership. Available data on these community leasing arrangements for local authorities is limited. Further research exploring the impact of leasing versus community ownership could add greater nuance to the asset ownership picture across Scotland, especially in areas of high deprivation.

Communities also vary in their stability, with some being more transient than others. Factors such as economic opportunities, affordable housing, educational opportunities and migration can impact on how 'transient' people are within a community.[31] Urban and rural areas can have different challenges when it comes to transience within their community e.g., higher migration (urban) and seasonal employment (rural). Stable communities tend to foster stronger social bonds and a greater sense of collective identity, which can positively influence community-led initiatives and resilience-building efforts. Other local demographics can also influence community-led activity e.g., presence of retirees with professional/management experience can significantly influence the resources and skills available within a community. Within this research, community capacity and skills were felt to highly influence the ability to successfully advocate, build connections, and fundraise for community-led activity.

The geographical context heavily influences patterns of community activity. Remote and rural areas have fewer local services, both from the private sector and public sector provision. Gaps in services in rural areas often acts as a driver for community-led solutions, a factor which may be absent in more urban context. Investment flows and transport infrastructure were also felt to impact the vitality of rural towns and villages, with poor connections across and within rural local authorities impacting on joined-up working at the locality level and pockets of cold spots within the wider local authority.

Rural areas present unique opportunities and challenges for community-led activity. Market failures in rural areas often create spaces for community-led activity, highlighting the importance of grassroots initiatives in addressing local needs. Moreover, rural communities typically have a longer history and tradition of community activism, which can serve as a foundation for collaborative efforts. It was noted that some support initiatives are exclusively rural-based to avoid displacement in cities e.g., support for rural community-owned business through the Plunkett Foundation. Funding and supportive legislation for community asset ownership is more established within rural areas of Scotland with the expansion of support to urban communities occurring in 2016. This has increased the proportion of urban community-owned assets, but rural assets still form the majority of asset transfers each year. In 2022, 21% of community-owned assets were in urban areas up from 18% in 2020, showing a slow increase in asset ownership across urban areas of Scotland. [32]

30 McMullin, C., Steiner, A., and Hill-O'Connor, C (2020) Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015: asset transfer requests – evaluation. Scottish Government. **https://www.gov.scot/publications/asset-transfer-requests-evaluation-part-5-community-empowerment-scotland-act-2015/**

31 Fancourt, G and Usher, R (2019) Rethinking Home Engaging transient and new communities in Big Local. Local Trust. **https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Transient-Report_web.pdf**

32 Scottish Government (2022) Community Ownership in Scotland. Assets by Urban-Rural Classification. **https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-ownership-in-scotland-2022/pages/assets-by-urban-rural-classification-2020-2022/**

## Identity and Attitudes:

Across this research, notions of identity alongside attitudes and behaviours were highlighted as influencing levels of community-led activity. For individuals, they can collectively shape how people view themselves, their communities, and their perceived ability to effect change. Perceptions of the community - and the attitudes, behaviours and cultural norms of regional authorities - also shape and influence levels of community activism and involvement.

The perception of community by local authorities significantly influences the role and strength of the third sector. Factors such as risk-aversion and concern for community well-being impact decision-making processes, particularly in initiatives like community asset transfers and leasing, where local authorities may exhibit caution or reluctance due to perceived risks. Many local authorities, particularly those in urban settings, have traditionally served as primary service providers. Challenges in the shift away from this model were noted as contributing to cold spot areas, where community-led initiatives may be less familiar or accepted, by both local communities and local authorities. Developing the skills and knowledge to co-produce solutions with communities, devolving decision-making power, and non-tokenistic engagement were all highlighted as a "work in progress"[33] within some local authority areas. Areas that were previously heavily reliant on council services may struggle to transition to community-led models due to a lack of resources and infrastructure to support these initiatives effectively.

Attitudes toward community-led development range from perceptions of change being "hard to achieve" to outright "unwillingness" to adapt traditional approaches.[34] These attitudes often reflect deeply ingrained cultural norms and institutional practices, which can present significant challenges to transformative change efforts. There was recognition of the political nature of community involvement, with distinctions drawn between volunteering for immediate needs and pursuing community ownership and delivery roles. Overcoming tokenism and fostering genuine community empowerment requires addressing power dynamics, promoting inclusivity, and recognising the value of grassroots leadership in shaping community outcomes.

A sense of "helplessness" was also believed to prevail among some communities, particularly in areas where traditional modes of council-led service delivery struggled to address generational issues and challenges.[35] It was suggested that cold spots may correlate with low levels of power and involvement in local decision-making processes, reflecting a wider disconnect between communities and their governing bodies. The attitudes, culture, and behaviours within local authorities significantly influence the approach taken to community engagement more generally – through allocation of resources and support mechanisms - and ultimately shapes the context for community-led activity.

## Systems and Processes:

Complex and time-intensive funding application processes were noted as a barrier to community-led activity, especially within deprived communities. These, along with a range of bureaucratic processes, were felt to require a high degree of capacity, self-efficacy, and specialist skills to engage with due to the administrative burden. Moreover, a lack of transparency in the processes and outcomes of these were felt to further erode trust and confidence in the system.

A lack of a collaborative and joined-up approach among stakeholders can also present a barrier to effective community-led initiatives. As funding sources become increasingly scarce, reflections noted increased competitiveness among community organisations and third-sector groups vying for limited resources. This competition can hinder collaboration and knowledge-sharing, as organisations become reluctant to share their experiences and expertise for fear of losing out on funding opportunities.

Infrastructure, both physical and digital, can serve as a barrier to community-led initiatives. Inadequate transport infrastructure can limit access to resources and opportunities for certain communities, particularly those in rural or isolated areas. Similarly, a lack of digital connectivity and knowledge can limit participation of community members in online engagement and decision-making processes.

33 Quote from participant interview with local authority staff member.

34 Quotes from participant interview with third sector support agency staff member.

35 Quote from participant interview with community anchor organisation staff member.

## Strategic Drivers:

Driving a coordinated vision forward requires gaining buy-in and commitment from various stakeholders across different levels of governance and community engagement. This process involves aligning interests and priorities, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that all stakeholders are invested in the shared vision for community development. Achieving buy-in and commitment is essential for the successful implementation of strategic initiatives and sustainable progress.

There's a growing recognition of the challenges and barriers faced by communities, particularly in areas that may not perceive themselves as 'cold spots' of community-led activity. Within this research, several cold spot areas were contested by stakeholders within local authorities and TSIs. Most participants that queried this term cited examples of community activity and informal volunteering that they believed would not be captured within this methodology.[36] Measures of volunteering were captured within this research, however, the potential nuanced differences between volunteering and community-led activity were discussed, with the latter seen by some participants as encompassing broader notions of power and decision-making within communities.

36 Volunteering levels were measured through use of the Scottish Household survey (4-year average 2017/18/19/22 were used to minimise impact of Covid-19 on data). This data captures both informal and formal types of volunteering. More information can be found here: **https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2022-key-findings/pages/10/#:~:text=27%25%20of%20respondents%20living%20in,%25%20respectively%20(Table%208.58)**

## Relationships:

The quality of relationships between strategic partners plays a crucial role in determining the degree of community-led activity within a given area. Poor relationships among key stakeholders can hinder collaboration and limit the effectiveness of community initiatives. Areas characterised by minimal connections or strained relationships across third sector interfaces, local authorities, community anchor organisations, and other regional authorities tend to exhibit lower levels of community-led activity. Conversely, good inter-agency relationships, characterised by continuity in staff, mutual respect, and knowledge sharing between agencies, alongside opportunities for networking and collaboration, have been associated with higher levels of community-led activity.

Internal dynamics within organisations also influence community-led activity. Infighting, limited knowledge sharing, and insecure contracts within organisations were felt to impede support for and attitudes towards community-led initiatives. For example, participants cited instances of insufficient knowledge sharing between different departments within local authorities and internal conflicts within TSIs as factors that negatively impact the ecosystem for community-led activity.

Building and maintaining relationships is a time and resource-intensive endeavour, especially in areas of deprivation where volunteers may face additional pressures and constraints. Relationships are also critical for facilitating peer learning and knowledge exchange within and between communities. These efforts are particularly crucial in times of reduced funding, where partnerships can help leverage resources and maximise impact. The benefits of strong relationships amongst stakeholders were noted as a key enabling factor in high community-led activity.

## Funding challenges:

Against the backdrop of reduced funding for local authorities and the third sector, community-led initiatives face significant financial constraints. The tightening of budgets at the local level has led to a reduction in service provision by local authorities, creating a greater need for community-led activities to fill the gaps and address local needs.

Despite the increasing demand for community-led activities, funding remains a core barrier to their implementation and sustainability. While communities are stepping up to address local challenges, the availability of adequate funding sources is often insufficient to support their efforts effectively.

Several issues characterise the funding landscape for community activities, including:

- Time and resources: Securing funding for community initiatives is often a time-consuming and resource-intensive process requiring significant effort and expertise to navigate complex application procedures and meet funding criteria. This can exacerbate existing disparities and challenges faced by marginalised communities in accessing funding and support.
- Long-term funding: Many funding sources for community activities offer only short-term support, creating uncertainty and instability for long-term projects and initiatives.
- Integrated funding and support: Fragmentation in funding sources and a lack of joined-up support services can hinder the sustainability and impact of community-led activities, as organisations struggle to access the resources and assistance they need.
- Community capacity: Funding is needed to engage with low-capacity or marginalised groups, who may be overlooked or excluded from mainstream funding opportunities. This is particularly crucial at the early stages of community-led activities, such as Community Asset Transfers (CATs) where support is needed to build capacity and empower communities to take ownership of local assets.
- Project-based funding: Funding for community activities is often project-based rather than core funding, limiting organisations' ability to invest in long-term capacity building and sustainability.
- Increased competitiveness: As funding sources become scarcer, competition for available grants and resources has intensified, placing additional pressure on community organisations to demonstrate their impact and effectiveness.
- Dependency on Windfarm/Oil Funds: Community activity in some regions is driven by windfarm or oil funds but there's concern over the future sustainability of these revenue streams, highlighting the need for diversification and long-term planning.

# Learning & Recommendations

The challenges of cold spots in relation to community-led activity across Scotland are, in many regions, long-standing and complex. Learning from this research seeks to highlight ways in which opportunities associated with community-led activities can be better balanced across these different regions, highlighting key areas for investment and support.

Policymakers and practitioners should tailor support strategies to address the unique challenges of cold spots. The cold spot areas identified and explored within this research represent regions that would benefit from support and investment that is shaped by an understanding of the local context. A range of factors from enhancing community capacity and improving local funding and investment, to fostering stable community environments are necessary in order to balance opportunities for community-led activities across different regions of Scotland.

Several recommendations emerged from this work that, whilst potentially beneficial for all areas, are of critical importance for cold spots of community-led activity.

### Capacity building and support:
Investing in early-stage capacity building and support is crucial for empowering communities to take on leadership roles in driving local development initiatives. Providing resources and training programs aimed at enhancing organisational and leadership skills can equip community groups with the tools they need to effectively engage in community-led activities.

### Relationship building and knowledge sharing:
Facilitating opportunities for relationship building and knowledge sharing among stakeholders is essential for fostering collaboration and partnership working. Allocating resources to support networking events and collaborative initiatives can facilitate cross-sectoral learning and cooperation, enhancing the effectiveness of community-led activities.

### Local flows of investment:
Leveraging local investment flows, through policy levers such as Community Wealth Building (CWB), presents an opportunity to maximise local benefit from policy initiatives. However, there's a need to increase awareness and support for local organisations to fully capitalise on these opportunities, promoting greater cooperation and partnership working at the local level.

### Transparency and accountability:
Enhancing transparency and accountability within systems and processes linked to community-led activity, such as Community Asset Transfers (CATs), is essential for building trust and confidence among stakeholders. Implementing mechanisms for meaningful community engagement and feedback can ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and responsive to local needs.

### Genuine engagement:
Moving away from tokenistic engagement towards genuine co-production with communities requires investment in skills and capacity building at both grassroots and regional authority levels. Empowering communities to play an active role in decision-making processes can lead to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

### Celebrate success:
Promoting local success stories can inspire and motivate communities to engage in community-led activities. Highlighting examples of successful initiatives can create a positive feedback loop, encouraging further participation and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration within the community.

### Support organisations:
Community anchor organisations and regional support agencies play a vital role in supporting the development of cold spot areas. Providing targeted support and resources to these organisations can enhance their capacity to drive positive change and address local challenges effectively.

There's a need to increase awareness of existing support organisations and funded programs, such as Just Enterprise and Accelerate, which offer free support and resources for community-led initiatives. Enhancing access to these resources can help bridge knowledge gaps and empower communities to leverage available support for their projects.

### Change takes time:
Recognising that cold spot areas are slow to change, but evidence suggests that long-term planning and sustained investment can lead to significant shifts over time. Case studies, such as those in Dumfries and Galloway (D&G), demonstrate the potential for transformative change through strategic interventions and community-led initiatives. Shifting attitudes, behaviours, and traditional ways of working requires a concerted effort, resources, and long-term commitment.

### Locally designed solutions:
Recognising that one size doesn't fit all, promoting locally designed solutions, and devolved decision-making processes can empower communities to address their unique challenges and priorities. Moving away from centralised decision-making structures towards greater local autonomy and democracy can foster greater ownership and accountability in community-led initiatives.

# Appendix

Data Sources and their uses within the research:

| Information | Source | Use within Research |
|---|---|---|
| Levels of volunteering | Scottish Household Survey (with support from Volunteering Scotland) | Proxy measure |
| Number of Social Enterprises | Social Enterprise Census 2021 | Proxy measure |
| Number of Registered Charities | OSCR extract 2023 | Proxy measure |
| Number of Community-owned Assets | Scottish Government statistics from 'Community Ownership in Scotland 2022 | Proxy measure |
| Number of National Lottery Community Fund projects | The National Lottery Community Fund extract 2023 (of 2022 data) | Proxy measure |
| Number of Accelerate projects | Community Enterprise extract 2023 | Proxy measure and comparator measure for support agencies / programmes |
| DTAS Membership number by local authority | DTAS extract 2023 | Comparator measure for support agencies / programmes |
| SES Membership by local authority | SES extract 2023 | Comparator measure for support agencies / programmes |
| SCVO Membership by local authority | SCVO extract 2023 | Comparator measure for support agencies / programmes |
| Number of Just Enterprise projects | Just Enterprise consortium 2023 (provided by CEIS) | Comparator measure for support agencies / programmes |

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Funded by: The William Grant Foudation
and Scottish Rural Action

Charity Number: SC006992 - Company Number: 107625

Front Cover Photograph: NASA Highlands