

Voices for Equity

People influence decisions on services and use of resources



Report

Voices for Equity
A Shetland Partnership **Participation** Project



Participation



People



Place



Money

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Introduction

The Voices for Equity project ran from May 2018 to April 2020 and aimed to reduce socio-economic inequalities in Shetland through participation. The project was funded through the [Fairer Scotland Action Plan](#) and was delivered by the Shetland Island Council through the [Shetland Partnership](#).

A final evaluation of the project was carried out, aiming to learn from the project's implementation, including to share experiences and make recommendations to inform future participation activity.

This document summarises the project from its outset in 2018 to its end in 2020. It looks at achievements related to the main goal and aspirations. Furthermore, this document gives some recommendations for future related projects.

Project Background

Understanding underlying causes and driving forces that lead to socio-economic disadvantage is crucial in order to reduce inequalities. Alongside research and good systems knowledge, there is a need to learn directly from those who are experiencing disparities and the disadvantaged outcomes.

The Voices for Equity project was a two-year project designed to help reduce inequalities in Shetland through participation, by bringing forward public voices and uncovering different aspects of inequalities in the islands. It acknowledged the need to learn directly from those who are experiencing disparities and disadvantaged outcomes in order to tackle inequalities.

The project method

The project method was designed to enable people experiencing challenges because of inequalities in Shetland to share their knowledge directly with decision-makers within Shetland's public bodies. It gave the project participants a new way to learn: from real experiences, both as private people and professionals, and therefore allowed a better mutual understanding of inequalities. It provided opportunities to build closer relationships between the participants and encouraged more direct contact between people living in a community who would not normally meet. By its nature, it represented a different form of community participation.

Project Purpose

The main purpose of the project was to:

Develop a methodology so that people in Shetland experiencing challenges as a result of Shetland's inequalities are able to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for Shetland's resources.

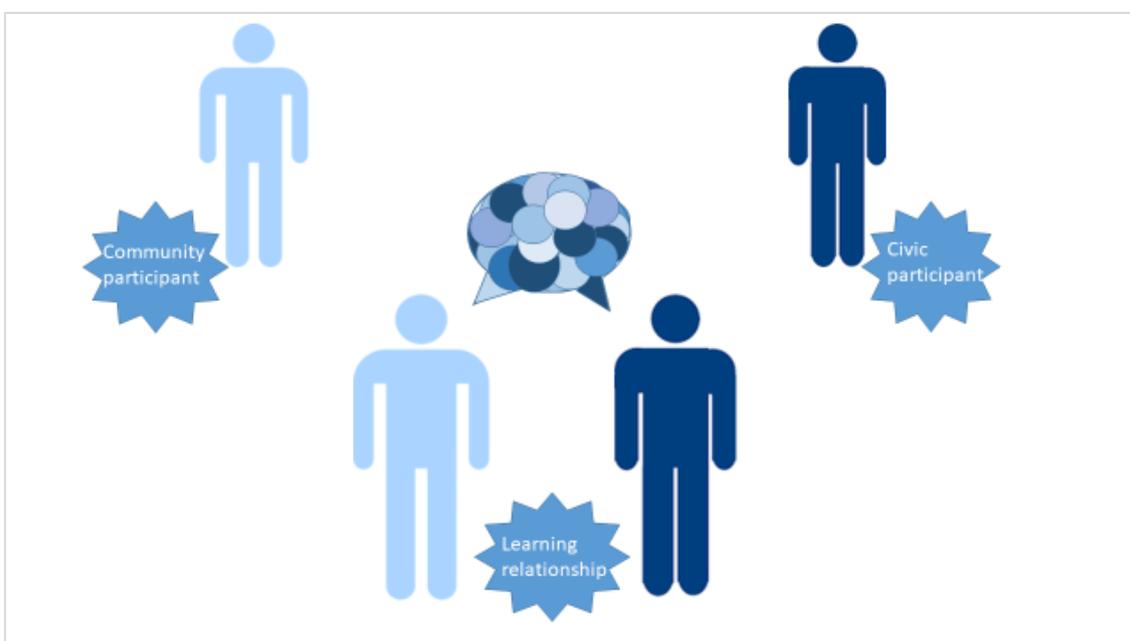
It was expected that implementing the methodology would deliver a number of aims both at systems level (Shetland) and individual (participants' level), see table on page 4.

The methodology

The learning partnership scheme is a reciprocal learning method that emphasises learning through relationship building and mutuality.

Community and civic participants are recruited and matched together in learning pairs to discuss and explore inequalities by bringing their personal perspectives and experiences to the conversations they have.

Mutual commitment, respect and confidentiality sustain their relationship, which is set to last for an agreed period. During the relationship, pairs are supported and assisted by the organising body, as appropriate (see Guide on Methodology at www.xxx.www). The method of sharing experiences in the learning relationship enables decision-makers (the civic participants) to be better equipped, with a more direct knowledge and understanding of inequalities.



Learning relationship

Voices for Equity, Purpose and Aims

Purpose

Develop a methodology so that people in Shetland experiencing challenges as a result of Shetland's inequalities are able to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for Shetland's resources.

The Aims

For Shetland

- A voice for community participants, and new relationships, on behalf of Shetland communities with people of influence (national and local policy makers)
- Improved links between and among communities in Shetland
- Improved sensitivity and effectiveness of the practice and services delivered by community planning partners
- Positive actions, as identified, in relation to the four priorities in Shetland's Local Outcome Improvement Plans, to address the causes and symptoms of Shetland's inequalities
- Embedding of this approach to participation in Shetland's Community Planning Partnership
- Producing evidence to help challenge stigma, particularly within Shetland's media narrative

For participants

- Increased capacity, confidence and self-esteem
- Improved links between community participants and civic participants, thus improving influence and communication between social networks, over the term of the funding
- Increased awareness and understanding of inequality implications for community planning partners.

Evaluation Framework

The analysis used to carry out this evaluation was undertaken in the first quarter of 2020, during the last months of the project. The main data sources used are responses to surveys and interviews gathered from participants over the duration of the project.

Some inconsistency appears in replies to surveys and questionnaires, in part because participation in the project was voluntary. Results and findings are therefore analysed in this context. It is, however, robust enough to give sound indications and recommendations.

What we evaluated

The aim of the evaluation was to learn from the implementation of the project and to make experiences and recommendations available for future participation projects.

The overall purpose of the Voices for Equity project was to develop a new method of participation. The vision was that this method would help achieve a set of aspirations; both for Shetland and for the participants in the project (see table on page 4).

This evaluation seeks to evidence the extent to which these aims were achieved, and the value of the methodology in contributing towards them. The conclusion provides a condensed synopsis of achievements, learning outcomes and recommendations for further development.

Data sources

Data was obtained by speaking to both community and civic participants throughout the project and through a digital Smart Survey and a questionnaire. Supporting documents were also used.

Data sources:

- Pre-mentoring expectations
- Smart survey
- Individual meetings with community participants
- Group meetings with civic participants
- Review of project documents and products

Pre-mentoring expectations

Knowing why people, both on the community and civic side, want to take part in a project like this and what expectations they have for their participation is important to understand mechanisms around participation and the learning relationship method. Moreover, the project aspired to increase participants' capacity, confidence and self-esteem and therefore a mechanism was developed in order to capture these changes.

In the first match meeting (see Guide on Methodology, available at www.xxx.www), participants were asked to fill in a pre-mentoring expectation sheet (see appendix). The sheet consisted of 12 different expectations and participants were asked to indicate any expectation on the sheet they

found relevant (see appendix). These were the same for community and civic participants, providing the opportunity to look for any differences between their expectations and motivations. The sheet also gave an opportunity to state any other expectation(s) the participants might have that were not already covered.

Smart-Survey

After every meeting, all participants were sent a link to a smart survey, asking questions about how their meeting had gone and how they felt going forward in the project (see appendix). Giving feedback through the Smart Survey was voluntary and not all participants completed the survey, or they completed inconsistently.

Individual meetings with participants

As a follow up and support mechanism, the project lead met with community and civic participants individually on a number of occasions throughout their relationship. The purpose of the meetings was twofold. First to check how comfortable participants were with their match and how their meetings were going. Second, to provide a good chance to learn what participants were speaking about in relation to poverty and inequalities. The conversations were open and were minimally led by the project officer. Meetings took place in cafes or in the office, and occasionally in participants' private homes.

Group meetings with civic participants

A discussion was facilitated with civic participants, in order to inform the evaluation of whether the method had made an impact on decision making and whether the method provides a good system for participation. Bringing the civic participants together also allowed for greater cross-sectorial collaboration and sharing of learnings and experiences from their participation. The group meetings followed a semi-structured setup, allowing free conversation but ensuring the project captured essential learnings and experiences.

Review of project documents and products

A number of documents and information materials related to setting up the project were produced by the project. The documents provided a framework and support, and gave the participants adequate information about the project and their participation:

- Information leaflets
- Mentor agreements
- Information and contract
- Prompts for conversations on socio-economic inequalities

Achievements

Purpose: Develop a methodology so that people in Shetland experiencing challenges as a result of Shetland's inequalities are able to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for Shetland's resources.

Evidence of achievement

A review of the data shows that the project recruited and matched a number of participants. To ensure that participants represented a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences, a number of organisations and services were contacted to support the recruitment process.

The (supporting) documents and support mechanisms provided a structure for the method, which participants appreciated. Participants were recruited from both the civic side and from communities, giving the mix of people anticipated in order to bring in diverse lived experiences of inequalities in Shetland.

Number of organisations contacted to inform and recruit	17
Number of participants	15 community 15 civic
Number of participants, gender	10 female 5 male- community 10 female 5 male- civic
Geography: Mainland and Island communities	27 mainland 3 island
Sectors/services	Council services and voluntary organisations
Total number of partner meetings	68

Many participants reported that the recruitment process was good; they felt they got the necessary information they needed to enter the project. Most participants, both community and civic, spoke about the excitement of being matched with someone they didn't know and how they were all a bit nervous before the first meeting. Despite being apprehensive, the participants confirmed they were all pleased with their learning partner and confirmed they were getting along well. All participants appreciated the structured induction, including contract and agreement signing and an informal voluntary start-up activity, to get to know each other. Feedback was that this set the tone for their relationship and gave a good structure. As meetings went on, some pairs asked for some support to guide and get their conversations to another level. This support was provided by the project lead and was appreciated by the pairs. It is assumed that this support contributed to the sustainability of the relationships.

Participants also stated that they found their conversations interesting and appreciated having dedicated time to speak about poverty and inequalities.

One participant told us:

"Meeting someone with the personal experiences of a troublesome life really hits home, far more than hearing or reading about it".

-Civic participant

Conclusion: Purpose achieved. A methodology for participation was developed and participants confirmed they shared experiences and had their voices heard.

Aims for Shetland

Aim: A voice for community participants, and new relationships, on behalf of Shetland communities with people of influence (national and local policy makers)

Evidence of achievement:

Thirty participants were recruited and matched into learning relationships, split evenly between community participants and civic participants. The civic participants represented a range of different services and organisations, and evidence shows that community participants felt they had their voice heard and strong relationships were built.

On several occasions, community participants were asked to give their views and perspectives on specific themes, such as issues related to services like transport, food and money. Participants clearly stated they were delighted to be given these opportunities to bring in their local lived experiences to shape policy development.

Both community and civic participants also appreciated this was an opportunity they would only get through this project. Moreover, several participants expressed that they would not hesitate to participate again were they given the chance.

“My learning partner makes me feel very proud and connected with Shetland”

- Community participant

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Participants confirmed they built new relationships.

Aim: Improved links between and among communities in Shetland

Evidence of achievement:

The Smart Survey shows that participants developed good relationships through the time they were meeting. 92.86 % of the respondents reported they felt they could be open and sincere with their partner and this was equal across community and civic respondents. With the exception of one civic participant, on one occasion who replied that they were happy to continue ‘if we make some changes’, all participants replied they were happy to continue in their match (97.62%)

From the outset of the project, reciprocity was viewed as a challenge. How can mutual relationships be built between people coming from such different walks of life? The Smart Survey responses show that the vast majority (85.37%) felt the relationship was quite equal, with only a small number of community participants feeling their learning partner was most in control. Participants also responded to say that, through their meetings, they recognised they had a shared interest in reducing inequalities and poverty, although their pathways into the project and previous experiences were very different.

Considering the different backgrounds and experiences represented by the participants in the project, it is a great achievement by all participants to have developed such sound and positive

relationships with each other. Several of the participants also reported that they stayed in touch through messages and emails between their meetings.

When the project brought the civic participants together to discuss their learnings and experiences from their participation, there was a feeling that the project was leading to better links between the sectors represented by civic participants in the project; improving links between and among communities. They now share the experience of establishing a learning relationship with a community participant and may draw on the learnings and experiences from their participation as they also get together as community planning partners. See appendix for details on the Smart Survey.

“When you are working with and for and in a community you need to fully understand the context of the many lives that make it up. By understanding and witnessing different points of view you build insight and understanding and are able to do a better job.”

- Civic participant

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Participants confirmed their new relationships improved connections and links across communities in Shetland.

Aim: Improved sensitivity and effectiveness of the practice and services delivered by community planning partners

Evidence of achievement:

Through conversations, civic participants shared their learning outcomes from their participation. Several stated that it increased their knowledge and understanding of inequalities, and that they also gained learning on a more personal level, such as developing a relationship with a new person, and improving listening skills. Participants, many who have lived in Shetland for many years, said how they gained new knowledge and insight into how it is to live in Shetland if you are on low income, or how living remotely may affect your life and opportunities.

“I find it really interesting to hear personal stories and observations of the community and getting a better understanding of the things that relate to life on one of our islands. I have found out things I was not aware of”.

- Civic participant

For further details about learning outcomes for civic participants, please see appendix page 20.

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Community planning partners participating in the project confirmed they improved their sensitivity and understanding of inequalities in Shetland.

Aim: Positive actions, as identified, in relation to the key themes in Shetland Local Improvement Plans, to address the causes and symptoms of Shetland's inequalities

Shetland Partnership Plan is the Local Improvement Plan for Shetland: 2018 -2028. The Plan has a shared vision and a key focus on reducing inequalities of outcome in Shetland. It has four priorities (key themes): money, people, participation and place. You can find more information about the Plan on [Shetland Island Council's webpage](#).

Evidence of achievement:

No specific guideline was given for the participants' meetings; initially the project was set up to allow them to speak about what they would like to discuss; many participants appreciated this free set-up as it allowed them enough time and freedom to get to know their learning partner. Despite this loose structure, conversations and results from the Smart Survey show that 83.33% reported they felt they were speaking about relevant and interesting things (and the majority of these were community participants). In conversations, both civic and community participants told us that some themes were recurring:

- Mental health
- Remoteness and territorial cohesion
- Transport, costs and accessibility
- Gender aspects and expectations
- Stigma, attitude and culture
- Cost of living
- Incomer/immigrant perspectives
- Delivery of public services.

It is difficult to establish a direct causal link between discussions and specific actions, particularly as a change in actions can take time. However, civic participants all reported using their newfound insight and knowledge gained from their experience of the project, to their workplace and other departments and influencers. A specific example is one of the community participants being asked to inform improvements for mental health services for immigrants.

For a more thorough description of recurring themes, please see appendix page 22.

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Evidence show that despite not given a specific guideline for conversations, pairs discussed topics highly relevant for the Shetland's Local Improvement Plan.

Aim: Embedding this approach in Shetland Community Planning Partnership

Evidence of achievement:

Several of the civic participants were recruited from those involved in the strategic planning of Shetland's Community Planning Partnership. This gave the project a strong link to the Partnership and several updates on the project's development were given to the Partnership's Management and Leadership Team. The project method represents a different form of community

participation, and several civic participants stated that they would encourage their colleagues to sign up should a similar project be run again.

A guide on the methodology has been produced and is available for future related projects. The guide can be found on Shetland Island Council's [webpage: www.xxx.xxx](http://www.xxx.xxx)

Conclusion: Aim achieved. The Voices for Equity project has assisted the development of this approach to participation for Shetland Community Planning Partnership.

Aim: Producing evidence to help challenge stigma, particularly within Shetland's media narrative

Evidence of achievement:

The project collaborated with Shetland Arts Development Agency to commission a professional artist to create an imagery to *“raise awareness of the significance stigma is experienced by and impacts on people living in Shetland”*.

In December 2019, a professional artist was contracted and visited Shetland to meet the project management and community and civic participants. The final piece of art is an embroidered tapestry reflecting on stigma and prejudice using Shetland nature as elements of recognition and identification.

The tapestry will serve as an outset to discuss stigma in Shetland. It will be used as a mean in interactions with people in Shetland, for example through Community Conversations. The Covid - 19 pandemic inhibited the progress but also gave new opportunities to exhibit the tapestry to new and wider audiences using digital tools.

Conclusion:

The project has helped consolidate that there is a need to address stigma in Shetland. Using art as a medium in combination with digital tools has added new opportunities to reach out to wider audiences.

Aims for participants

Aim: Increased capacity, confidence and self- esteem

Evidence of achievement:

The project carried out a pre-participation survey as the participants entered the project, in order to establish their expectations. This provided an understanding of the participants' motivations and inspiration to take part in the project, and what they hoped to achieve. The pre-participation survey results show that *‘increasing my self-esteem’* and *‘to strengthen my confidence’* were expectations participants had when they entered the project. Interestingly, more community participants than civic shared this expectation.

One civic participant expressed that they had improved their listening skills, to be able to listen without being prejudice. Another civic participant said they had gained more confidence in order to have conversations in their own office, after having participated in the project. Through conversations, community participants confirmed that their confidence and self-esteem had increased and their capacity had improved as they now felt they were capable of doing things they didn't think they would be able to before.

"I personally feel more confidence in myself too! The whole experience was so educational and invigorating! I would not hesitate to do something like this again!"

- Community participant

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Participants confirm that participating in the project has increased their confidence, capacity and self- esteem.

Aim: Improved links between community participants and civic participants, thus improving influence and communication between social networks, over the term of funding

Evidence of achievement:

Throughout the project, participants reported how their relationship with their learning partner had developed, how they learnt from their conversations and how they had learnt to appreciate their learning partner. The Smart Survey results show that all respondents (100%) felt comfortable with their learning partner and that their learning partner listened to their views and stories with respect.

With no exception, all participants who completed the Smart Survey stated they were happy to continue with their learning partner. The evidence shows that sincere relationships were built through the project, between people coming from very different backgrounds. In one example, participating in the project and the rapport built between the civic decision maker level and community level led to a civic participant visiting a community group they would have been unlikely visited previously.

On an individual level, all participants confirmed that they felt the gap between themselves and their learning partner's realm had decreased.

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Evidence show that links between community and civic participants improved during the project and new links was established between social networks.

Aim: Increased awareness and understanding of inequality implications for community planning partners

Evidence of achievement:

Both community and civic participants shared information that demonstrated how their awareness and understanding of inequalities in Shetland had increased through their participation; specifically how they felt they had a more thorough perception and awareness of the different aspects and characteristics of inequalities in Shetland. As expected, civic participants appreciated their new

insights, but community participants also expressed how they had gained a new understanding of how it is to be responsible for making and informing big decisions and that it can be very hard to make difficult priorities that affect many people.

Conclusion: Aim achieved. Participants confirmed they had increased their understanding and awareness of inequality implications – for individuals and for community planning partners.

Other Reflections

It proved challenging to recruit participants in order to fulfil the diversity aimed for. In particular, it was difficult to recruit people from island communities, young people and pensioners/old people. Attempts were made to recruit from these groups, but with less success. Experience proved that the most effective recruitment occurred when the Project Lead spoke directly with potential participants. There may be many reasons for this. However, organisations and services serve as important linking points for the project, so it is vital that people in the relevant services and organisations have a good understanding of what the project is about, how it will work and its potential impact when making contact.

Initially, the project was named a mutual mentoring project, and the mentoring aspect of the method was a key characteristic of the project. As the project designed progressed, it became clear that mentoring, as such, was not what the project actually aimed for. Mentoring relationships are built on the foundation that one more knowledgeable or more experienced person helps or guides a less experienced or knowledgeable person to achieve a set goal or goals, and tends to be more truthful to specific setups or structures. Some of the participants, especially on the civic side also raised questions about what was expected of them as mentors. It became clear that what the project aimed for was not a mentoring process between the participants but rather a focus on reciprocal learning. Thus, the project changed the terminology, from developing mentoring relationships to reciprocal learning relationships.

Moving away from the mentoring concept and focusing on the reciprocal learning allowed the method to be freer and more open, giving the participants the opportunity to bring in the topics and experiences as they wished, and for the pair, together, to be responsible for developing the relationship. It allowed the project to have a stronger focus on reciprocity, acknowledging that both participants in the pairs had equal resources and assets to contribute, however somewhat different.

Learnings and Concluding remarks

Summarising the learnings

Through the span on the project, we learnt that:

- Recruiting works best when the project is in direct contact with potential participants. When organisations and services are involved to recruit participants it is vital that they have the full understanding and information of what the project is. This improves the experience for both the recruiter and the potential participant.
- Both civic and community participants appreciated a structured induction. It sets the status and expectations for participation and give the pairs a good starting point to build their relationship.

- Participants appreciated the loose structure and the freedom they were given to form their relationships and conversations. However, experience also show that some level of support for conversations was needed for some of the pairs and that support possibly helped sustain the relationships.
- As participation is voluntary and does not require any duty, a certain level of commitment is necessary to sustain the relationships. It is a huge benefit to the project if the Project Lead can provide support to keep in touch with participants and potentially schedule meetings for the pairs.
- An evaluation tool to monitor how participants are doing should follow participation.
- The methodology developed in the Voices for Equity project has proven to be an adequate method to develop relationships across communities, to give people a voice, to foster new insights and participation in community planning.

Concluding remarks

The project's aim was *'to develop a methodology so that people in Shetland experiencing challenges as a result of Shetland's inequalities are able to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for Shetland's resources'*. The evidence and data presented in this report confirms that the project achieved its aim. Through the project method, a good number of participants recruited from communities in Shetland shared their knowledge and experience with people responsible for Shetland's resources.

Referring to the Guide on Methodology (www.xxx.www) several positive outcomes can be drawn from the method:

- The direct contact gives firsthand knowledge and closer relationships
- It is reducing the gap between 'the governing and the governed'
- The process is a different form of participation and represents a diverse approach to active citizenship
- Participation not influenced by group dynamics

The project did not aim to directly change policy or suggest areas for improving service delivery. However, it is valid to question outcomes: what results or changes in inequalities could participants expect?

Building synthesis between evidence and new policy is challenging and sometimes conventional data and evidence does not lead to anticipated change. The Voices for Equity project built on acknowledged theories on learning; that knowledge is constructed in interaction with others, and was grounded in the belief that participation built on new relationships will discover new knowledge, insight and understanding.

It is clear that the Voices for Equity method allowed new types of evidence by involving people personally through new relationships across communities in Shetland. The anticipation is that increased knowledge and understanding gained through relationships and conversations will lead to a change in approach, service delivery and priorities.

This report has shown how the project has achieved its aims and how the methodology is an enhancement to participation in community planning.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Pre-mentoring expectations
- Appendix 2: Mentor evaluations (Smart Survey)
- Appendix 3: Learning outcomes, civic participants
- Appendix 4: Recurring themes from conversations with participants
- Appendix 5: Information Leaflet
- Appendix 6: Mentor Agreements
- Appendix 7: Project information and contract
- Appendix 8: Prompts for conversations on socio-economic inequalities

Appendix 1

Pre-mentoring expectations

As a partner in this project, I hope:

- To learn from my learning partner
- To be better at understanding someone who is different from me
- To strengthen my skills in understanding new situations
- To increase my understanding about myself and my situation
- To have my views and opinions challenged
- To contribute with my knowledge and experience
- To improve my listening skills
- To further develop my communication skills
- To increase my self-esteem
- To strengthen my confidence
- To increase my knowledge about decision making processes in Shetland
- To increase my knowledge and experience in order to improve participation in Shetland
- Anything else? Please explain _____

Appendix 2

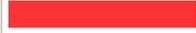
Mentor Evaluation: Voices for Equity

Please, state your e-mail address		
During your mentor meeting, generally what percentage of time do you talk?		
More than 50%	It's less than 50%	
I think it is 50-50	I don't speak so much	
How much are each of you in control of the process?		
I feel that my learning partner is most in control	I feel it is quite equal	I feel I'm most in control of the process
Did you get an opportunity to give feedback to your partner today?		
Yes, I gave plenty of feedback	Yes, I think I gave my partner some feedback	No, I don't think I gave any feedback today
Did you receive any feedback from your partner today?		
Yes, I received lots	Yes, I received some	No, I don't think I received any feedback today
Do you feel comfortable around your mentoring partner?		
Yes, we get along well	I'm not quite sure	
It's alright, but I also feel a bit insecure	No, I don't feel comfortable	
Are you able to be open and sincere with your partner?		
Yes, this is not an issue for me	I'm not quite sure	
Yes, sometimes	No, I find that difficult	
Are your stories, views and opinions met with respect?		
Yes, they are	They are, sometimes	No, that is not my experience from the meeting
Do you talk about things you find relevant and interesting?		
Yes, we do!	Yes, more or less	No, we don't
Are you happy to continue? Please use the comments field to tell us how we can support you!		
Yes, definitely	Probably- if we make some changes	No, I don't want to continue

Smart Survey Evaluation: Voices for Equity

During your mentor meeting, generally what percentage of time do you talk?			Response Percent
1	More than 50%		14.29%
2	I think it is 50-50		78.57%
3	It's less than 50%		7.14%
4	I don't speak so much		0.00%

How much are each of you in control of the process?			Response Percent
1	I feel that my mentor partner is most in control		4.76%
2	I feel it is quite equal		85.71%
3	I feel I'm most in control of the process		9.52%

Did you get an opportunity to give feedback to your partner today?			Response Percent
1	Yes, I gave plenty of feedback		42.86%
2	Yes, I think I gave my partner some feedback		47.62%
3	No, I don't think I gave any feedback today		9.52%

Did you receive any feedback from your partner today?			Response Percent
1	Yes, I received lots		50.00%
2	Yes, I received some		35.71%
3	No, I don't think I received any feedback today		14.29%

Do you feel comfortable around your mentoring partner?		
		Response Percent
1	Yes, we get along well	100.00%
2	It's alright, but I also feel a bit insecure	0.00%
3	I'm not quite sure	0.00%
4	No, I don't feel comfortable	0.00%

Are you able to be open and sincere with your partner?		
		Response Percent
1	Yes, this is not an issue for me	92.86%
2	Yes, sometimes	4.76%
3	I'm not quite sure	2.38%
4	No, I find that difficult	0.00%

Are your stories, views and opinions met with respect?		
		Response Percent
1	Yes, they are	100.00%
2	They are, sometimes	0.00%
3	No, that is not my experience from the meeting	0.00%

Do you talk about things you find relevant and interesting?		
		Response Percent
1	Yes, we do!	83.33%
2	Yes, more or less	16.67%
3	No, we don't	0.00%

Are you happy to continue? Please use the comments field to tell us how we can support you!		
		Response Percent
1	Yes, definitely	97.62%
2	Probably- if we make some changes	2.38%
3	No, I don't want to continue	0.00%

Summary from meeting with civic participants

This is what the civic participants told us about learning about inequalities:

- Remoteness plays an important part in Shetland and remoteness has different perspectives also within the remote areas. For many people, opportunities are limited if you live remotely.
- Time is a limited resource when you live remotely.
- Mobility is very important to people. Many people's lives are designed around the bus and ferry timetable.
- Culture is still strongly affected by gender expectations. In small communities, life can become difficult if you are not meeting or do not want to meet those expectations.
- Self-esteem and confidence are important factors to create a decent path for yourself in life.
- Life is really complicated for some members of our community. For many, things are not as straightforward and easy as one would like to think.
- Many people think they need to 'fight' alone against the system. An 'us and them' attitude creates and sustains barriers between people and between people and services.
- In Shetland, there is an attitude that you should not get above yourself, and you should remember where you come from. People remind you of this by e.g. asking about your surname, where you live, who you're married to, who your family is etc. Unconsciously, this is ensuring people they give answers appropriate to whom you are (based on information you have given about your family relations), rather than treating you as another human.
- How costly things are in Shetland. Many people spend a lot of their monthly income on necessities and services. The cost of childcare and transport are two examples. A significant proportion of parents' income is spent on this, which also has a gender aspect.
- Things we believe is easy and straightforward for immigrants and incomers when they want to move/arrive in Shetland is not. Language is a barrier and so is accommodation and getting on the work ladder. For many, developing a social network is challenging, maybe more than we think, as we like to think Shetland is a welcoming community. Especially it is difficult for those on one income and with no or little social network.
- Humanity in services is important as we think that we are designing services so they fit their users but through conversations, we hear that they do not fit the users. People are experiencing a gap between decision-making level and community level.

On how the process of participating in the project had been, the civic participants told us that:

- Matching was good and it went well. Relationship was developed.
- Good to have a structure at start (cards to prompt first conversation).
- Structure and support got us connected and opened up the discussions.
- It is good to commit to meet several times. It builds relationship and you learn more about the person you are matched with.
- By being matched you get perspectives on life you would not otherwise get.
- It was good to start the relationship with signing contracts and agreements. It is important that participants get a good description of the project.
- The setup provides continuity, which is good. It gives an opportunity to have inequalities regularly on the agenda. It makes you think and keep the topic high on the agenda. The regularity reminds you of the importance of the topic.
- It was good to meet outside in the communities. It was good to have informal meetings where 'life' is on the agenda. It gives you a 'real world feel'.

Any learning on personal level:

- Participation is something else than consultation, building relationship is important.
- Gained more confidence to have conversations in own office after having participated in the project.
- Had personal opinions challenged, especially on benefit system, care system etc.
- Meeting someone with the personal experiences of a troublesome life really hits home, far more than hearing or reading about it.
- Have improved skills in listening without being prejudge.
- Have reflected on how lucky I have been in life.
- Broadened understanding about how life can be really difficult for some members of the community.

Appendix 4

Recurring themes in Voices for Equity Conversations

Benefits and Money

The participants describe how financial strengths and mental well-being are linked, and how a lack of money gives a sense of feeling trapped. Managing a life on a tight budget is hard and stressful, and participants speak about how all their focus and energy is drawn on making ends meet with neither energy nor money left to improve their life or conditions. Furthermore, they tell stories of how difficult it is to get out of poverty and how it is to have to let go of opportunities – and sometimes your belongings - to make ends meet. This is especially hard for those participants who have young children to care for. Like all parents, they want to give their children their best opportunities but it is difficult to follow the parenting advices on healthy lifestyle and standard of living when you have no money to do so. They describe a feeling of falling out of the social norm and further how that shapes their mental well-being. The participants express how it is hard to be poor in a rich community.

“It is not easy to be poor in a rich community and the divisions in Shetland are increasing. Some have a lot, others have very little. “

Mental Health

Participants speak of how “bad mental health” or “mental health issues” are serious matters for Shetland. Some mention the dark winter, others speak of the accessibility to alcohol and drugs and some speak of the high pressure on the young generation today as reasons for why mental health issues seem to be a growing issue and concern.

Many of the participants speak of their own mental health as being poor or bad, and how this affects their lives. They comment on how it seems to be easier to get help if you’re physically ill than if you are struggling mentally and how it is to be on the waiting list for treatment and being offered anti-depressives.

Suicide, anxiety and depression is specifically mentioned. It is recognised that there has been a strong effort in reducing the stigma connected to mental health issues, but that it is still seen as a weakness, especially amongst men.

“Having bad mental health does not make you totally unfit or unqualified. There is a lot of stigma connected to mental health and it is as if you have to prove that you’re also all right and not totally incapable.”

Transport

The participants speak about how opportunities in Shetland rely heavily on mobility and opportunity to get around. Therefore the transport connections and costs of transport is mentioned, both inter-island and travelling away. Those who live in the islands feel they miss out on cultural and sports opportunities in Lerwick, either because the buses and ferries don’t correspond or it is too expensive. Furthermore, participants from the islands will often have to stay the night in Lerwick and not everyone has friends or relatives to stay with. B&B’s and hotel expenses add to the already high costs.

For those who are unemployed, transport connections and costs make a big difference to whether they can apply for jobs and get into employment. For some it also makes a difference as to whether they can keep their benefits.

The costs of getting away is far too high, especially for families. The participants speak about how not everyone in Shetland has family or networks and for single parents it is difficult when they have to take one child to hospital in Aberdeen as they will need to take their younger children with them.

“I rely on the buses to take me to work outside Lerwick. But, very often the timetable doesn’t fit with the working hours. So I know I can’t get there to do the job, but I still have to apply for it, otherwise I will lose the benefits. And I have to turn up for job interviews even though I know I can’t get the job because of transport. It’s silly.”

Stigma

Participants describe how stigma exists in Shetland and what the feeling of being stigmatised does to a person. Shetland is a small community and the participants speak about how difficult it is to get away from your past here. You’re paying a big price if you’ve made a mistake as this will follow you and your family. For some, this creates a feeling of loneliness and contributes to isolation. The participants tell stories of feeling judged and labelled by the community and people who don’t know them, and how this further leads to a sense of shame. A feeling of not having control over one’s own situation seems to put additional pressure on already challenged individuals.

“It is difficult to get away from your past here in Shetland. People know what you have done and it follows you. People should know that what they hear about people isn’t always true.”

Shetland

Many of the participants speak of certain characteristics of the Shetland community; conditions and circumstances they explain with the way the Shetland community is or works. Already mentioned is the feeling that your mistakes follow you and how quickly the community judge you. Although Shetland is known for being friendly and hospitable, participants also speak about how difficult it can be to become a member of the community and that a lot is about who you know in the community; this sets your status, not what you know. Some participants also speak about how strong traditions are in Shetland and that inequalities seem to be accepted by the public, and e.g. being a “soothmouther” still creates a feeling of never being a true Shetlander, despite having lived here many years.

“It seems that people in Shetland doesn’t like changes, they prefer that things are as they have always been.”

Participating in the project will

- Put you in close and confidential contact with people who make decisions
- Give you the chance to have your voice heard by someone with power and influence
- Give you the opportunity to be a resource, helping decision makers to better understand the everyday experiences of inequalities in Shetland
- Increase your experience and knowledge about decision making in Shetland
- Enable you to contribute to a stronger and more trusting relationship between public services and the general public.

Please contact

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Voices for Equity

“People influence decisions on services and use of resources”



Shetland Partnership Plan
2018-2028



Appendix 6

PARTNER AGREEMENT

The meeting between learning partners is an equal one- to- one meeting, which builds on mutual trust and respect.

This is a learning partner agreement between:

.....

As your learning partner, I will:

- Show trust and respect towards you and your stories
- Be an honest and confidential partner
- Be listening, accepting and interested in your views and perspectives
- Be unprejudiced, reliable and open for change
- Recognise that our contributions to this relationship may be different, but I will give it equal acknowledgement and recognition.

With this agreement, we agree on the following:

- Our meetings are confidential. Neither of us will take notes nor keep records from our meetings
- We will keep our appointments on date and time
- We will work constructively together, and will seek help and advice if any disagreements occur
- We won't exchange valuable gifts or lend out money
- We agree that this agreement will come to a closure if it becomes necessary for either of us.

Communication and meeting frequency:

Name	Telephone	E-mail

Our learning partnership starts on this date _____ and will last for up to 12 months.

Date for the next meeting:

Our first meeting will be at:

Welcome to the Voices for Equity Project

This document provides information about taking part in this project.

Purpose and Aims

The project's aim is to reduce inequalities in Shetland through participation. The project will enable previously unheard voices to be listened to, and thereby improve equity in Shetland. Its purpose is to enable people experiencing challenges as a result of Shetland's inequalities to share their knowledge directly with those with responsibility for making decisions about the use of Shetland's resources.

The project is based on reciprocal learning; the sharing of experiences and perspectives between community and civic participants through two-way communication.

The project is a two-year project funded by the Scottish Government through the [Fairer Scotland Action Plan](#). Shetland Islands Council, Community Planning and Development Service is responsible for project implementation and its daily management, on behalf of the Shetland Partnership.

Participation in voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you have the right to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Choosing not to participate or to later withdraw won't have any negative impacts on your current and any future relationships, or need for services, provided by the Council and other organisations in Shetland.

How Will It Work?

You have already met with the Project Officer and been paired up with a mentoring partner. You will meet about ten times over a year, to discuss, explore and share experiences about inequalities in Shetland. You will be each other's mentors and, using your own knowledge and perceptions, support and empower each other.

The partnership will be built on mutual trust and respect, to ensure equality. The standards and values for your participation is stated in the mentor agreement.

The project will not be delivering any specific service, on behalf of the Council or other organisations, but you and / or the Project Officer may (with consent) wish to refer people to services to get support.

Half-way through the mentoring partnership, the Project Officer will arrange to meet with you both; for a catch-up and to get feedback from your mentoring conversations.

The Project Officer will be available, throughout, should you wish to meet with her, alone or together.

Privacy and Data Protection

The partnership is about sharing experiences, but only your life experiences that you feel comfortable sharing.

The Project (through the Council), will keep information about your name and contact details as well as the information shared in your first meeting with the Project Officer. The purpose of this will be to enable a meaningful matching for you and to be able to make contact with you, about the Project. This information will be deleted, once the Project has concluded, in 2020. This is in

accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. Please refer to our Data Protection Privacy Statement.

You may share personal and sensitive information with your project partner. However, neither of you will take notes nor keep records from your meetings.

Support to Get Involved

There is no payment for being involved in the project. The time you give to this will be voluntary. Any costs associated with the community participants being involved, such as travel and childcare, will be covered by the project.

Project's Outcomes and Dissemination

If you're involved in the project, you may want to make a statement or provide feedback on your learning and experience from the project in a variety of ways. The Project Officer will support this.

The Project Officer will prepare and publish a report regarding the project; to promote the approach and to comply with the Scottish Government funding. This will be available, online. It will not contain any personal information. Any information you have given and shared in the project will be anonymised and only anonymised case studies or anonymised quotes would be used. You will have an opportunity to review the draft text. As much as possible, the creation of the report and other materials will be driven by you.

Contact Information

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 Solarhus 3 North Ness, Lerwick, ZE1 0LZ
 Phone: 01595 744861
 E-mail address: nina.hogmo@shetland.gov.uk

.....
 Date and Signature

Name	Telephone	E-mail

Appendix 8

Prompts for conversations on socio-economic inequalities

The Voices for Equity project aims to reduce inequalities in Shetland through participation. It brings people from different sides of the Shetland community together in mentoring relationships to find new ways to improve participation and to bring forward previously unheard voices. In order to improve the lives for everyone in Shetland it is important that we share knowledge and experience directly with each other. This way we can both learn more about the different aspects of inequalities as well as about the governing and decision making system in Shetland.

*"We know that conversations and relationships change the way we treat each other.
Through conversation, we are no longer them and us.
No longer unaccountable.
No longer strangers.*

Fairer Scotland Action plan

Questions for reflection and conversation

Which three criteria would be minimum for you in order to live a good life? (E. g what do I need to own/have/do)

Who is at risk of poverty in Shetland, and why?

What are the underlying links between poverty and low personal wellbeing (including isolation and loneliness)?

How would you describe Shetland and the Shetland community?

What one thing would you most like others to understand about your life or situation?

What is an acceptable standard of living for people who are disabled/ sick in a way that makes paid employment impossible?

What or who would make the biggest difference to your situation?

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For more information, please see our website or call 01595 743888

